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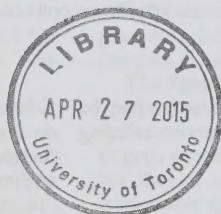
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Monday 20 April 2015

Lundi 20 avril 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave LevacPrésident
L'honorable Dave LevacClerk
Deborah DellerGreffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 20 April 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 20 avril 2015

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome some very special guests here today at Queen's Park. I had a great meeting with the chairs of our community advisory boards that provide advice to the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. I want to welcome Julianne Dunbar, who's a member for the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre; Ian Peer, who is the Chair of the Community Advisory Board at Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre; Nancy Martin, who is the Chair of the Central East Correctional Centre's Community Advisory Board; and I believe we had with us earlier Wesley Crichlow, who is the Chair of the newly formed Community Advisory Board at Toronto South Detention Centre. I thank them for their public service and welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to introduce the mother, Dawn Perry, of page captain Cailyn Perry from the great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Welcome.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: On pay equity day, I'd like to introduce the House to Mary Cornish, who's the chair of the Equal Pay Coalition; Samantha Scott from SEIU Local 1, who is their staff legal counsel; Lori Davis from OPSEU, a pay equity negotiator; Nancy Hutchison—everyone will know—from the OFL; she's their secretary-treasurer. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Richard Redman of United Rentals in Mississauga. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm pleased to welcome to Queen's Park Jamie McMillan, the founder of Journeyman: It's a Status, Not a Gender, who is a journeyman ironworker and welder from Local 736 in Hamilton. She's here for Equal Pay Day. Jamie, welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great privilege this morning to introduce the mother of the page from my riding of Davenport, page Misha Davies Gedalof. I want to introduce his mother in the public gallery this morning: Sarah Davies. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's my pleasure to welcome students from West Hill Collegiate, who will be joining us later this morning, Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker; good morning, Premier. My question is for the Premier. In the documents received during the gas plant scandal, we saw the confidential advice to cabinet. We learned the path to balance you presented to the financial community was complete fiction. The numbers presented were "never a real expectation" and "a deliberate policy." It went on to say that, "Over the medium term, we have notional targets that add up to the deficit numbers, but not yet full plans to deliver on them." It also divulged, "For the extended outlook, neither sector targets nor plans yet exist."

Well, Premier, the time of reckoning is fast approaching. Do you have a credible plan to balance, or is it still aspirational?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I was tempted to say to the member opposite, in response to his question about whether we have a credible path to balance: Yes; simply yes. However, I will elaborate because I know that the member opposite is very excited to see the budget that will be delivered this week, and that he is leading up to and anticipating that event.

As the member opposite knows, our commitment to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18 remains in place. We are overachieving on the targets that we have set in 2014-15; our government beat the deficit target by \$1.6 billion. The member opposite knows that we have a plan that includes program review, renewal and transformation; he knows that managing compensation costs is part of that path to balance; he knows that making sure that everyone pays their fair share of taxes—those are components of our path to balance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the Premier: The once-secret documents went on to say that "in order to hit the deficit targets, spending growth has to decrease dramatically"—but they're not alone. Moody's changed their outlook from stable to negative, concerned over your inability to eliminate the deficit. The chamber of commerce, in their How Bad Is It? report, tells us we're in crisis—and becoming increasingly dire. The Auditor General said, "Ontario's debt continues to grow faster than the province's economy"—that this is crowding out other spending and we can expect another downgrade.

Despite all this, you haven't changed a thing. Your numbers are going the wrong way: \$9.2 billion grew to \$10.5 billion grew to \$10.9 billion. You haven't changed

a thing. When are you going to provide a serious, credible and detailed plan to eliminate the deficit?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just repeat what I said in terms of in 2014-15: Our government beat our deficit target by \$1.6 billion.

I will say to the member opposite that I recognize that we made decisions in terms of investments in this province, in terms of investment in people's talent, their skills and our education system, in terms of investment in infrastructure, public transit, roads and bridges across this province. We made those decisions as being very important to the future well-being of this economy. We are committed to that.

At the same time, we've taken a balanced approach, and let me just expand on the plan in terms of the path to balance. When I talk about program review, renewal and transformation, we're talking about reducing overlap, we're talking about improving efficiency. When we talk about managing compensation costs, we're committed to net-zero bargaining. That is a critical part—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Beating your fluffed-up numbers is no achievement, Premier.

Over the last couple of weeks, our colleagues have presented you three budget asks. The first asked you to stop your planned pension tax, as it will put a burden on business and cost us jobs. The second asked that your cap-and-trade tax not be adopted, as it hurts families by putting a tax on everything. The third asked you to fix home care by reducing the number of agencies patients must deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Today, we make our fourth ask. Based on everything you've heard, from all of the experts, including your own Ministry of Finance, Premier, we ask that you present a serious, credible and detailed plan to balance the budget by 2017-18.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say to the member opposite, on the fourth request: Absolutely. I look forward to him reading the budget before he comments on it, and he will see the serious, credible plan that's in place.

On the issues around home care, we are in the process of transforming the health care system. I agree with him that there's more that we can do in terms of making sure that people understand the system, that they can access the system, and making sure that we've got the right governance in place.

What he's saying in terms of the first ask is, "Make sure you don't work to have retirement security in this province." Well, we're not going to do that. We are absolutely committed to retirement security, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton will come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The second ask is, "Don't fight climate change. Don't do your part to fight climate change." We're not going to acquiesce to that, Mr. Speaker. We are going to fight climate change.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy leader, come to order.

New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. On May 21, 2002, Dalton McGuinty moved an opposition day motion in this House and said, "What would possess the government, I mean any government, to sell" this asset?

We know what possesses this government: It's years of financial mismanagement and scandals, and the fact that they don't know how to pay for their promises.

By selling a majority stake in Hydro One, Ontarians will lose control of this asset, and prices will skyrocket to pay for the last 12 years of this government's mismanagement—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Premier, why are you selling a majority stake in Hydro One when you said yourself that you can't guarantee that hydro rates won't go through the roof?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just say to the interim Leader of the Opposition that in order for Ontario to move forward, in order for us to realize our potential as a province and a future economy that is solid, we must invest in infrastructure. There's no option there.

When you talk to companies outside of this country, they look at us and they say, "Well, we like the look of Ontario, but we're not sure that you have the plan to invest in infrastructure that's necessary."

Mr. Speaker, we have that plan. This is about investing in new assets that are needed for today. It's about 20,000 jobs a year that are critical to our short-term prosperity. But in the long run, we must make those investments: \$16 billion in the GTHA and \$15 billion on projects outside the GTHA. Those are necessary to the future prosperity of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier: In 2002, Dalton McGuinty said, "This government should know that when you turn a natural public monopoly over ... it is the consumer who ultimately pays the price. Rates would go up. Rates could in fact go up dramatically and there is nothing consumers could do...."

Premier, you're not only giving up majority control, but you're taking \$4 billion that, by law, is supposed to be used to pay down the hydro debt and lead to lower electricity prices for everyone, because we'd have less debt to pay off.

Even with OEB oversight, customers are already facing a 42% increase over five years in their hydro bills.

Premier, if you can't guarantee that the sale of a majority in Hydro One won't increase rates any higher, why on earth would you expose the hard-working people of Ontario to even more hardship?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just say to the member opposite that as we have made this decision to make investments in the transportation infrastructure within the GTHA and beyond—the transit, the roads, the bridges that we know are necessary—we are being very careful not to make the mistakes that the PCs made when they sold off the 407. In fact, that is exactly the model we have looked at to say we know that that is not what we can do—so, making sure that the regulatory protections remain in place for people in this province.

As I said last week, if there's a transmission line that needs to be built in northwestern Ontario, we will make sure that that transmission line is built.

The way that rates are set by the OEB: That's how they're set now; that's how they will be set in the future. Those protections are in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Premier, in 2012, former Energy Minister Chris Bentley said: "We need to keep the whole asset in public hands, public control working for families and businesses...."

Premier, you're now selling a majority share of Hydro One to pay for your scandals and irresponsible management of Ontario's finances. The government I was part of came to understand that losing control of a public asset like Hydro One is a mistake. Up until recently, the Liberal Party seemed to agree with us, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, will you stop this foolhardy decision and keep a majority share of Hydro One in the hands of the people of Ontario, who own the company?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, let's talk about exactly what it is we're doing, rather than the fiction that the member opposite is putting forward.

We are making a decision to invest in enhancements to the GO line, a foundation for regional express rail that will allow us to have 15-minute service across the system. We are looking at projects like the Hamilton RRT and the Hurontario LRT.

Outside of the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, we're looking at programs like Connecting Link. I would hope that the party opposite, that seems to talk about their concern for small-town and rural Ontario, would understand that having the Connecting Link Program that sup-

ports the maintenance and the upgrading of roads that are necessary connections between those small towns and provincial roads is critical.

That's the kind of infrastructure that we're investing in, because we know our economic prosperity relies on it.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Can the Premier remind me and can she remind Ontarians: Did she run on a plan to sell off Hydro One, remove Ombudsman oversight and hand away control of this strategic asset to Bay Street?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would remind the leader of the third party that we both ran on a plan to invest in public transit by relying on a review of assets as part of that plan. The leader of the third party seems to have forgotten that.

She also seems to have forgotten that we need badly to invest in transit and transportation infrastructure. I would suggest that her new deputy leader could tell her how important it is to invest in transportation infrastructure, because he lives in the 905 and he knows how critical it is that we make those investments.

To do that, we were very clear in the last election and in the last budget that we needed to look at the assets that were owned by the people of Ontario, and in a responsible way—not in the way that the Conservative Party did it, which was to give away a provincial asset with absolutely no return. We were going to do this in a responsible way so that we could make those necessary investments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier is planning to sell off a majority of Hydro One. It's a plan she didn't run on. No matter how she protests, she did not run on that plan. Before last week, the Premier hadn't even actually talked at all about a plan to sell off the majority of Hydro One.

She hasn't shown Ontarians the respect that they deserve, or even asked them what they think about this plan. Does the Premier honestly believe that she has a mandate to sell off Hydro One to Bay Street?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I believe I have a mandate to do is to invest in the future of this province, to invest in the transit and transportation infrastructure that will allow us to thrive.

I will freely admit that this is not about ideology for me; it's not about ideology for us. It is about ideology for the leader of the third party. But our position is that we must make these investments.

A former NDP cabinet minister, Frances Lankin, who was a member of the advisory council advising us, and the Power Workers' Union, who are supportive of our plan, understand that. They understand that it's important to make practical decisions. LIUNA, the building trades, mayors and councillors understand that those investments are critical.

If we don't make those investments, which is exactly what the leader of the third party is advocating, then we will not be prepared to be competitive on the global stage.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it's kind of funny. Conservatives and New Democrats both think this is a really bad plan, but somehow the Liberals think it's a good plan. I don't see how that has anything to do with ideology. It's about the fact that the Liberals are doing something wrong for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order.

Please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier is ignoring Ontarians. And to add insult to injury, she's actually taking away their advocate at Hydro One. Let me talk about page 26 of the Clark report: "We are also proposing that" Hydro One "will no longer fall under the scrutiny of the Ontario Ombudsman...." So not only will Ontarians no longer have control of Hydro One; when they have a problem they won't even have a champion to stand up for them. Does the Premier really think that along with less control Ontarians want less oversight as well?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party knows that publicly traded companies have a different set of oversight mechanisms, and I'm happy to talk about those, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure she will give me another opportunity.

But the fact is that we need to be clear about what the leader of the third party is saying. The leader of the third party has no plan about how she would invest in infrastructure within the GTHA and outside of the GTHA that we know is needed. She has no plan. In fact, she ran on the plan to review assets, which is what we have done.

The fact is that what the leader of the third party is advocating is not to make these investments in transit, not to create 20,000 jobs a year, not to make us competitive on the global stage; to say to companies in other parts of the world, "Actually, because of ideology, we're not going to invest in roads and bridges and transit that would make us competitive. We're not going to create those jobs that we"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, let me get this straight: Ontarians are going to get an Ombudsman to complain about flat beer, but when it comes to the hydro system, they're not going to have any Ombudsman whatsoever. It makes a lot of sense to me.

My question's for the Premier. Ed Clark admits that the first part of the Liberal Hydro One sell-off will cost Ontarians at least \$150 million annually. That's stable annual income that could fund hospitals, schools and,

heck, even infrastructure. By the time you sell off a majority of Hydro One, how much is it going to cost Ontarians each and every year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party understands full well that what we are proposing, and what Ed Clark has proposed, is that we make this into a stronger company, that we retain substantial ownership, that we have controls in place in terms of government influence, but that in fact the company become more efficient and that we realize the funding, we realize the dollars we need to invest in the assets that we know are needed right now and into the future.

As I said, the leader of the third party has no plan to make those investments. She has no plan for investing in transit and transportation infrastructure that is needed in communities across the province: in our urban centres, in our small towns, in our rural communities and across the north. She has no plan to do that. We do, and that's why we are going to make this decision. We are going to make sure that the protections are in place for the people and we're—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier knows that this plan is going to put hydro rates through the roof, but she's putting all of her trust in the Ontario Energy Board to keep rates under control. Now, that's the same Ontario Energy Board that allowed a 40% increase in rates for Enbridge just last year. Can the Premier give Ontarians any guarantee that her privatization plan will not leave them paying even more on their hydro bills once it's implemented?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party knows full well that the OEB does approve rate increases, and the OEB approves rate decreases, and enforces rate decreases. The leader of the third party has chosen to pick part of the report and part of the quotes that Ed Clark made. So I want to just be clear that in terms of what we can predict going forward, when Ed Clark was asked about whether rates would go up, he said this: "We don't think so. In fact, we" believe "the opposite will be the case," that "there will be a favourable impact on hydro rates over time."

I know that this is a concern, and I'm not going to cede this ground to the leader of the third party. I understand that people are concerned. That's why we are making sure that those controls remain in place. The controls that are in place right now will remain in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, selling Hydro One is going to drain needed provincial revenue. It is going to cost Ontarians more. It's going to mean higher bills and less money for infrastructure. It will mean less control and less oversight. It is a bad, bad plan, and the Premier knows it.

Will this Premier do the right thing by the people of this province and pull the plug on this short-sighted plan today?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is the job of any Premier of this province to look into the future and make sure the decisions that we make today are going to be in the best interests of the province going forward.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, with the infrastructure deficit that was left by the previous government and, quite frankly, governments before that, we are digging ourselves out of that hole. We started in 2003, and we have to continue to make those investments.

My commitment to the people of Ontario, when I ran in the election last June, was that we would make those investments, that we would make sure we looked past the next election cycle and that we invested in the infrastructure—whether it's bridges in Kenora, whether it's roads in our small towns or whether it's transit in the GTHA, that we would make those investments. That's why we reviewed our assets and that's why we have made this decision.

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is for the Minister of Education. Some 24,000 students at the Durham District School Board were met with a picket line today. Those 24,000 students won't be in the classroom today. The parents of 24,000 students are wondering how their children will spend that day. The parents of 24,000 students are worried their children aren't learning the skills they need.

These 24,000 students and their parents are just the beginning of a mess your 12 years of Liberal fiscal mismanagement have created. Minister, what do you say to those students who want to learn, and what do you say to the parents who want to see them succeed in the classroom?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Obviously, we're very concerned about the students and the parents in Durham, but I think it's important to understand that what is happening in Durham is a local strike between the local board and the local union. We know that in order to resolve this—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's not a local strike. What local strike will be on tomorrow?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is warned.

Please continue.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I understand that the board in Durham has indicated that it's willing to come back to the table. I would encourage the union to do the same, because we know that, ultimately, the resolution is to come to a local agreement. That's absolutely the way that we will resolve this: to come to negotiated collective agreements.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Minister, you know that there are a number of local boards that are prepared to go out right now.

This weekend, we all heard from students and parents. The message was clear: They don't want another spring break; they want to be in the classroom, on the sports field and going on their field trips. Your years and years of Liberal fiscal mismanagement are putting all of that in jeopardy. There are just no negotiations taking place.

Students are worried that they won't be able to improve their grades before the end of the year. Parents are worried that they won't see their children's graduation ceremony. Minister, can you guarantee that these students will be back in the classroom and their parents will actually see them graduate this year?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I need to correct one of the statements that the member opposite made. He said that there are no negotiations going on. We were very distressed last week when OSSTF walked away from the central table. I want to report to everyone in this House that we worked very hard with a provincial mediator over the weekend, and as a result of that hard work by all parties with the mediator, the central negotiating table has in fact resumed negotiations. Negotiations are going on at the central level.

1100

What that means is that because central negotiations are occurring, we have an opportunity to do what we all know we need to do to resolve the situation so students are in the classroom, which is to make sure that we reach a negotiated settlement, a negotiated collective agreement. That's what we're doing.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. The Premier insists that no company is going to be able to buy more than 10% of a privatized Hydro One. But does the Premier realize that if she sells 60% of Hydro One to private owners, the private companies will outnumber the province in every vote in every board meeting?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, I would say to the member opposite: Does he realize that if we do not invest in transit, in transportation infrastructure in this province—and particularly coming from a riding like Toronto–Danforth, I would expect that the member opposite would recognize that those investments are critical. I hope that the member opposite also recognizes that there is no plan being put forward by his party in terms of how he would make those investments.

What I have said and what I made crystal clear in my conversations with Ed Clark and with his team is that the protections, the de facto control over the decisions that are made, would rest with the government. That's why we have proposed that there would be substantial ownership. That's why we have proposed controls over the chair and so on, that this would be a broadly held company and it would be a strong company and the price-control protections would—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, the Premier wants to keep 40% of Hydro One and privatize 60%. I want to remind her that 60 is more than 40.

We know that the private investors will be looking for one thing: profits and dividends. That's what they're supposed to do. But you know where the money is going to come from. It's going to come out of the pockets of the ratepayers.

Can the Premier explain how she can say the province will have de facto control of Hydro One when the public will be outnumbered three to two by private investors?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just talk about those protections that were absolutely fundamental to our decision-making in this. I'm going to talk about the Ontario Energy Board, because as the member opposite knows full well, right now the Ontario Energy Board sets rates. Let's look at what the Ontario Energy Board did in March—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In March 2015, the OEB decreased rates by \$100 for Enbridge and Union customers. In 2010, Ontario Hydro asked for a rate increase for distribution by the OEB and was ordered a 9% reduction for its capital request. In 2012, Hydro One asked for a rate increase for transmission, but the OEB ordered a 3% reduction for its capital request.

When OPG applied for a 6.2% rate increase in 2011, the OEB denied the request and lowered rates by 0.8%. That's the protection that remains—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

RETAIL ALCOHOL SALES

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, last Thursday, the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets released its report on how to modernize beer sales in Ontario. Grand River Brewing is located in my riding of Cambridge and their craft beer is very well known locally—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins—James Bay.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I've heard for quite a while now that craft brewers like them have a difficult time in getting access to the market, that there's an inherent unfairness when it comes to the beer retail system in Ontario.

Ed Clark and his panel made several recommendations, which I understand that our government will be acting on. Speaker, through you to the minister: Could you please explain how the proposed changes will help our local beer producers by restoring fairness to the system?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'd like to thank the member from Cambridge for the question and her continued advocacy as well on behalf of her community.

I'm proud to say that the changes we'll be introducing represent the biggest shakeup of the sale of alcohol in

Ontario since the end of Prohibition. Some 450 grocery stores in Ontario will now be able to sell beer, and the Beer Store will return to its co-operative roots by opening up ownership to all breweries with facilities here in Ontario.

So far, the feedback we've heard has been overwhelmingly positive. Cam Heaps, the chair of Ontario Craft Brewers, said this: "This is a monumental day for craft brewers and for all consumers in Ontario. We believe that this package of fundamental changes ... will unlock craft brewers' true growth potential, allowing us to quickly double or triple our direct brewery jobs."

Irvine Weitzman, president of Mill Street Brewery, said, "Greater access to consumers and stability in our relationship with the Beer Store will make it possible for us to plan for, and invest in, future growth with confidence."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'd like to thank the minister for that answer.

Speaker, our government has a strong track record when it comes to creating jobs. I'm glad to hear that modernizing the beer system in Ontario will create jobs not only in my riding of Cambridge, but all across the province. I'm also happy to hear that we've listened to consumers and we're delivering more convenience and expanded choice.

However, any plan that expands the sale of alcohol distribution needs to take into account the impact it will have on social responsibility. Any changes that we make must uphold our province's strong record when it comes to the responsible sale of alcohol.

Speaker, through you to the minister: How have we ensured that the proposed changes to the sale of beer uphold social responsibility?

Hon. Charles Sousa: That's a great question, Mr. Speaker, and I'd again like to thank the member from Cambridge for her advocacy. Our government has a strong record when it comes to job creation, and she's right when she says that our plan will create more jobs in the craft brewing industry. In fact, John Hay from the Ontario Craft Brewers has this to say: "This is a game-changer. This is a fundamental change. We can create a couple thousand jobs directly and all kinds indirectly in smaller communities right across the province."

The member from Cambridge is also right when she says it's important that we balance social responsibility. To do so, we'll maintain strict controls over how beer is sold in grocery stores. In fact, Andrew Murie, the CEO of MADD Canada, said this: "We are pleased that the council has listened to our concerns throughout this process. Given the good relationship to date, we have confidence in the council's continued commitment to work with MADD to ensure that beer is introduced to grocery stores in a socially responsible way."

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier. Last week the sorry state of your government's handling

of the province's finances was once again confirmed when you told Ontarians that Hydro One was going on the auction block. Your claim is that the revenues generated from your fire sale are going to Liberal election promises, including public infrastructure, but the people don't believe you. Your record on accountability gives them every reason not to trust you.

Premier, I asked your minister this question before, and now I'll ask you: Will you put any deal for Hydro One in front of the Auditor General and the Financial Accountability Officer, and subject it to a value-for-money audit so the people of Ontario can know whether or not they're getting value for their money?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question.

The principles that the council is guided by are about incremental value for Ontarians and for consumers. They're also about ensuring that we provide greater investment opportunity thereafter.

We've always said that we'll be transparent and open in our discussion. So, absolutely, what we're doing will be open for discussion, will be reviewed. There's going to be a process over the next couple of months prior to broadening the ownership of Hydro One, and it's going to be in the best interests of all concerned, because we've mandated that, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'll go back to the Premier.

Premier, imagine all of the roads, bridges and subways you could have built if it weren't for all of the scandals and mismanagement over the past 12 years: eHealth, \$2 billion; Ornge, \$1 billion; the gas plant scandal, a billion dollars—and that's just to name a few.

Premier, your record on openness, transparency and accountability is—how can I put this in a kind way?—abysmal.

Ratepayers need to know that the proceeds from the sale of Hydro One are going to go where the law directs that they should go; namely, the \$27 billion of hydro debt. When you sell off 60% of that asset, the revenue piece will be dropped as well. It will drive up hydro rates again.

So I'll ask you one more time: Will you subject this deal to the Auditor General and the accountability officer—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Minister.

1110

Hon. Charles Sousa: Oh, Mr. Speaker, imagine if they had applied the same principles to the sale of the 407. Imagine if the annuity of the \$1 billion annually was there for the benefit of the people of Ontario today.

We recognize the mistakes they made, and we're ensuring that we don't make them again. That is why we're broadening ownership. That's why we're insisting on the integrity of dividends that's going to be assumed by the ownership, still, of Hydro One. That's why we're re-investing it into the Trillium Trust which is going to be

legal because we recognize we're also applying a portion of that to the debt of OEFC and consolidated debt.

We recognize the importance of investing. The member across has just admitted that he would not invest in those transit projects because he feels that the return on investment is greater by holding an operation that is not—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Charles Sousa: —should be. We're doing both. We recognize the incremental value that comes from it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Order. Thank you.

New question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. This morning I joined education workers on the picket line in Durham, and it felt a lot like 1997. While this Premier claims she cut her teeth in education, the actions of her government are throwing our publicly funded schools into chaos.

Liberal cuts to education are undermining the ability of students to learn by forcing community schools to close, reducing in-classroom supports and limiting access to special education. It's frankly not surprising that we are seeing Harris-era labour unrest, with the first group of OSSTF teachers in Durham on strike as of today, and Sudbury potentially joining them next week.

Why is it that when Liberal insiders need a leg up, it's no problem, but when it comes to our educators and our community schools, the Liberals say that the cupboard is bare?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I really do have to challenge the premise of this question because once again the third party keeps trying to promulgate the idea that we have cut education funding. We didn't cut education funding. It's stable this year. It's exactly the same as it was last year, and there are actually fewer students in the system than there were the year before. That means we're actually spending more per student than we did last year.

If you look at our record over time, we've increased education funding by \$8.1 billion. That's 56%. So I absolutely deny the premise of the question. We have not cut education funding.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Premier: Premier, when you cut \$6 million in special education, when you provide \$36 million less for textbooks, in-classroom support and supplies, when you close 88 schools across the province since 2011, you simply cannot act surprised when Ontarians speak out.

This government's right-wing austerity plan means 21 fewer early childhood educators in Windsor-Essex, 118 fewer education workers in Peterborough and 50 fewer educational assistants in Toronto. It means students in

Durham and Sudbury need to worry whether or not they will actually be able to finish their school year, with grade 12s wondering if they will be able to transition into our post-secondary system. New Democrats and Ontarians know that it is not progressive to cut \$500 million from education.

When will this government stop cutting education, dealing out pink slips and closing community schools, all while calling it progressive?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I repeat, once again, the facts are just simply wrong. We have not cut funding for special education; we've increased funding for special education, just as we have increased every other line in Ontario's education budget. It's going up, not down.

However, we do have this sort of myth that the NDP keeps trying to sell to us: that we should ignore the fact that we have declining enrolment. It is absolutely true that the enrolment in many boards has gone down. The enrolment in many boards has gone down by 5%, 10%, 15% and sometimes almost 20%. Of course that means they're going to have to change. When enrolment goes down that dramatically, adjustments will happen.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Chris Ballard: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure. Minister, in the recent election, our government ran on a plan to review our province's assets in order to invest in vital long-term infrastructure. Last week, Ed Clark and his council released their recommendations on how to unlock the value of our province's assets in order to make these important investments.

We know that by investing in infrastructure, we can spur economic growth and create jobs. Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: Could you please inform this House of how Ed Clark's review will allow our government to invest in transportation infrastructure and create jobs?

Hon. Brad Duguid: In the last election, we ran on a plan to invest \$29 billion in transportation and other critical infrastructure. Thanks to the recommendations from Ed Clark and his council, we'll now be able to invest \$31.5 billion in transportation and critical infrastructure over the next 10 years.

Our government has committed to making the largest infrastructure investments in Ontario history, and the response has been very positive. John Tory, the mayor of Toronto, said, "I think it is a significant day, a significant step forward for transit in Toronto."

Jan De Silva, president and CEO of the Toronto Region Board of Trade, has said, "This funding will create good jobs while improving our region's productivity by modernizing our infrastructure to reduce congestion."

Mr. Speaker, these are critical investments we're going to be making—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Supplementary?

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I know that constituents in my riding will be glad to hear that our government is increasing investment in transportation infrastructure. They know that our plan will create jobs, spur economic growth and allow them to spend more time with their families.

I was thrilled to join the Premier last Friday when we announced that, thanks to these investments, there will be increased service on the Barrie GO line. Constituents in my riding were delighted to hear that the GO line will increase from 70 to more than 200 weekly trips. The people in Newmarket–Aurora will directly benefit from the government's unprecedented investment in infrastructure.

Minister, can you please inform this House on how communities across the province will benefit from these investments as well?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Our government is making an unprecedented investment in infrastructure. As part of our plan, we'll invest \$16.5 billion in transit in the GTHA alone. Over the next 10 years, it will expand weekly trips across the entire GO rail network from 1,500 to nearly 6,000. That's a lot.

Unlike the opposition, we know the importance of investing in infrastructure. We know it's important to our economy, and it's important to keeping Ontario competitive. In a joint statement, a number of organizations—CivicAction, CodeRedTO, the David Suzuki Foundation, Evergreen CityWorks and the Pembina Institute—said, "We applaud the government's announcement ... of more than a billion dollars in new, dedicated funding for transit service and new capital projects in the GTHA."

"We look forward to seeing the government move forward on the implementation of this important initiative."

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, you've already admitted that your pay-to-pollute plan is a tax. What you have failed to mention is that this tax on everything will be one of the biggest taxes in Ontario's history.

The cost of groceries, heating your home, raising a family and doing business in Ontario is on the rise. The most recent StatsCanada numbers show that food costs have increased by nearly 4% since last year, while rent, property taxes and electricity have also increased.

People are struggling to keep up with these rising costs, and your pay-to-pollute tax on everything hasn't even begun yet.

Premier, why are you making the people of Ontario choose between heating or eating?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change is going to want to speak to this issue.

But let's just be clear on what the member from the opposite side is saying. She's basically saying that we don't have to worry about climate change; that there's nothing that Ontario has to do; that Ontario has no responsibility to either take advantage of the innovation

opportunities that come with climate reduction, or to do our bit to reduce our footprint, to make sure that we take part in a global move to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so that we can cut down on the extreme weather events that I know are taking place in the member's riding, because they're taking place all over the province: the flooding, the wind, the drought in some parts of the continent. What the member opposite is saying is, "Don't do anything to address that; we have no responsibility as Ontarians." We reject that.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Premier: What I'm saying is, if you would have taken into consideration the consultation ideas that were suggested, a carbon tax on everything probably would not have happened, but you ignored the public across Ontario.

StatsCanada numbers show that Ontario has the greatest cost increases across Canada since last year. And what is the Liberal plan to help Ontario families all about? It's about putting a carbon tax on everything to fund your sorry government's mismanagement.

Ontarians cannot begin to save for retirement when they're worried about how they're going to afford to heat their homes. The Green Energy Act already takes \$1,100 out of a household's yearly income, and your approximate three-cent increase on the cost of gas will cost drivers another \$100 per year.

Premier, how are people going to afford to live in Ontario if you keep raising the cost of everything?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I don't know where to start; it's very amusing. "All across Canada, prices weren't going up as fast": (a) that's not true, and (b) BC, Alberta and Quebec—which is most of Canada—all have a price on carbon. So the member just proved our point. She's wrong.

Second of all, food prices went up because apple production was down 80% and then 60%. We want to be able to grow apples in Ontario because apples are a good thing. Drought in California, where 30% of our food comes from now, is going up.

Prices went up in grocery stores, the member should know, because—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Huron-Bruce will come to order. As you asked the question, I'm sure you wanted to hear the answer.

A one-sentence wrap-up.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you very much for making the government's case. Maybe we can give the member another question, Mr. Speaker.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mr. Speaker, good morning to you. My question is to the Premier. Across the province, Liberal cuts to health care have been having a devastating

impact on patient care. On Friday, the Ontario Health Coalition held a day of action in front of the Sudbury MPP's constituency office to bring attention to Liberal cuts to health care in northeastern Ontario.

The numbers speak for themselves: 75 positions are being eliminated in the North Bay hospital. In the Sault Area Hospital, we are seeing the closure of 56 beds and 59,000 nursing hours. In Sudbury, it's 42 nurses who are being cut; nearly 40 positions will be lost in Timmins.

Will the Premier finally take responsibility for the cuts to health care in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think the member opposite knows that we continue to make substantial investments in health care. The budget, the envelope for health care, each year has been going up. It will continue to go up in the years forward. A significant portion of that funding goes to northern Ontario.

We actually leave these important decisions to the hospitals themselves as well as the local health integration networks, at that local and regional level, to make the decisions that they deem most appropriate to ensure that the outcomes that we want to see in our health care system—the highest quality of care, timeliness in terms of provision of that care, and the appropriate staffing to deliver that care—that that's provided. We feel that it's important that that decision be made locally by our independent health care facilities in conjunction with our LHINs. That's what's happening in all parts of the province, including in the north.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the Premier: In March, a northern health care worker was quoted as saying, "We will probably be in front of [Glenn] Thibeault's office eventually." Look: On Friday, they were.

Even though this government tries to place blame on hospitals for the cuts, Ontarians know better. In fact, the president of the medical staff at Health Sciences North recently said, "I don't blame the hospital, because it's the Ontario government that's making them do it."

After decades of downsizing, Ontario hospitals have been cut more deeply than anywhere in Canada and now have the fewest beds left of any province in this country. Will the Premier tell the people of this province how many more cuts are coming with regard to her health care plan?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we've increased our hospital funding across this province by more than—sorry, it's risen from \$11 billion, when we came into office in 2003, to over \$17 billion now. That's a 50% increase in hospital funding, and it doesn't include the increased investments that we're making in home and community care as we continue that shift of patients who can be adequately or even, often, better cared for at home or in the community. We're increasing our funding to that sector by 5% this year, 5% next year and 5% the year after that. This year alone, it's about \$270 million as an increase.

But even in Sudbury and the Greater Sudbury area, the reality is that our investments have been increasing. The funding for hospitals in Greater Sudbury has gone up by 62% since 2003, more than \$100 million.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: My question is for the Deputy Premier and President of the Treasury Board.

In the past election, we ran on a plan to maximize the value of our government assets in order to make critical investments in infrastructure. Based on their review, Ed Clark and his advisory council have recommended to the government that we broaden the ownership of Hydro One.

We've seen the mistakes that have been made, including that of the previous Conservative government when they imprudently gave away the 407. Because of their imprudent actions, constituents in my riding who access the 407 regularly now have to pay high tolls to foreign owners any time they want to use the highway.

Deputy Premier, how are we ensuring that we don't repeat the mistakes of the previous Conservative government with our plan to sell shares in Hydro One?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member from Burlington. There are several fundamental differences between the selling of Highway 407 and our plan for Hydro One. Let me highlight just three of those fundamental differences:

(1) Hydro One does not now, and will not in the future, have the power to set its own rates. Rates will continue to be set by the independent Ontario Energy Board. In stark contrast, when Highway 407 was leased, the government of the day made a deal that let the owners charge whatever they want.

(2) The province does not receive any ongoing revenue from the Highway 407 lease. As it would retain an ownership stake in Hydro One, the province will continue to receive income from Hydro One.

(3) The use of the proceeds of the lease of Highway 407—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —was not tied to any—any—government investment at all. It was used to pay the bills. The gain from Hydro One will be used—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'd like to thank the Deputy Premier for her response. It's comforting to know that our government has a comprehensive and well-thought-out plan when it comes to broadening the ownership of Hydro One and, in doing so, that we'll be able to make much-needed investments in transportation infrastructure, including GO train service enhancements for my community and my residents.

However, it's important that any action we take doesn't have an adverse effect on electricity rates. Some are saying that our plan to unlock the value of Hydro One would drive rates up. Deputy Premier, is that the case, or

will electricity rates actually come down thanks to Hydro One's improved performance?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's important to reiterate that Hydro One does not and will not set its own rates. Rates will continue to be set, as they are today, by the independent Ontario Energy Board. That's not changing. The OEB's mandate is to protect the interests of ratepayers and to set just and reasonable rates.

Additionally, our government intends to introduce legislation that would strengthen the regulatory oversight of the OEB to protect ratepayers, including increasing the penalties for non-compliant companies, enhancing the oversight of utilities and more protection for consumers who sign energy retail contracts.

Ontarians can rest assured that ratepayers will continue to be protected as we move to unlock the value of our assets and invest in much-needed infrastructure across this province.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. Hydro rates are out of control. Rate increases are forcing cuts in the classroom, hospitals and long-term-care homes, and the hikes are leaving businesses and households in the dark. Sixty families in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound alone had their utilities disconnected last fall because they could not afford your rates. But bills are about to get a lot higher after you sell off Hydro One and expose Hydro One's blockbuster debt of \$27 billion.

1130

So I ask you, Premier: How much more out of control will the rates get? How many more families will have their utilities disconnected?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just reiterate some of the points I have already made. The first one is, the way rates are set today is the way rates will be set going forward. I gave some examples, and I will do that again, Mr. Speaker.

The second point I want to make is that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I actually believe—and this was one of the points that was put forward by Ed Clark—that we can see a better company. I actually believe that we can see a better company in broadening the ownership of Hydro One.

But let me go back to the way rates are set. In March 2015, the Ontario Energy Board decreased rates by \$100 for Enbridge and Union customers. The Ontario Energy Board sets rates, sometimes it approves increases, and sometimes it requires decreases. That regime will continue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Speaker, this Premier and her energy minister are clearly out of touch. Let me reiterate that rates 42% higher over five years is not the direction we should be going in.

The 60 families in Grey-Bruce whose lights, heat and hydro you allowed to be shut off really show what is happening in this province under your watch. You have failed to look after the cost of living for low-income Ontarians.

But the question underpinning all this is: What is this Premier's advice to low-income families, frail seniors and public institutions who can't afford their rates anymore—where exactly should they cut to make up the impact of your hydro increases?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt, when we came into office in 2003, there was a degraded energy system across this province. There had not been investments. There had been neglect. We have built up the energy system, Mr. Speaker; 10,000 kilometres of line have been replaced. I will acknowledge that there is a cost associated with that. Because that was not done in an ongoing way by previous parties, it had to be done, and we have done that. Because we recognize that there is a cost associated with that upgrading, we have put in place programs to keep hydro rates down.

I hope that the member opposite will make sure that his constituents are aware of those programs, whether it's the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program or whether it's the saveONenergy Home Assistance Program—those are programs designed specifically to do what the member opposite is talking about. I hope he will make sure his constituents—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, today is Equal Pay Day, a day that marks how much further into the next year a woman has to work in order to earn the same salary a man earned the year before.

Each year in this province, women's average earnings are about one third less than a man's—an injustice that is both a human rights issue and a major barrier to Ontario's economic and social well-being. Eliminating the gender pay gap is a multi-faceted challenge, but we know from other countries that it can be done, given the right government legislation and a real commitment to act.

I would like to ask the Premier, after more than a decade in office, how can you justify allowing the gender wage gap to widen under your watch instead of close?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member for this very, very important question—very appropriate for Equal Pay Day.

Our government is committed to developing a wage gap strategy in Ontario that is going to close the gap in earnings between men and women. That's part of the Premier's mandate letter to me as Minister of Labour.

I'm pleased to say that today we're announcing the creation of a wage gap steering committee. This steering committee is going to develop recommendations, is

going to help create a strategy that's aimed at closing the gap through the actions of business, of government, of labour and of all Ontarians. Two external advisers—two very good external advisers—are being appointed, Linda Davis and Dr. Singh. They are going to be joined by Ontario's Pay Equity Commissioner, Emanuela Heyninck; and Nancy Austin, the wage gap strategy executive lead will be representing the Ministry of Labour. The object here is to make progress on this issue.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.
Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, it's embarrassing that we have yet to remedy this situation in 2015. After more than a decade of Liberal government, the problem is getting worse. The gap has widened to 31.5% from 28%. Simply talking about the issue and appointing another panel is not enough. Women's livelihoods are at stake.

It is not progressive to allow the gender pay gap to widen. It is not progressive for the government to refuse to comply with its own pay equity laws for female-dominated professions like midwifery and community service.

When can Ontarians expect real action from this Liberal government to close the gender pay gap?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.
Thank you.
Minister?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The minister responsible for women's issues.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Our Ontario Pay Equity Act continues to be recognized across Canada and internationally as one of the most progressive pay equity statutes in the world.

In terms of action, I do want to highlight what this government has done to make sure we have a fair society for women and make sure they're paid the same as men in similar jobs.

There is more work to do. You heard from the Minister of Labour about the panel, but there has been a number of programs the Women's Directorate has supported to help low-income women and women who experience violence, and help people get new skills and careers.

More than 2,200 women have participated in training through the Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training Program. We have a micro-lending program.

Be assured that our government is very, very determined to close the wage gap in Ontario.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order from the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to introduce some guests who are in the east members' gallery. The parents of Kristen Neagle, my OLIP intern, are here—Craig Moore

and Cindy Rampley—as well as a friend of mine from Ottawa, Aman Hundal. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

The President of the Treasury Board and Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know everyone would love to welcome Ian Peer to the Legislature today. He's a very fine retired member of the London Police Service and a great friend of all of us. Welcome, Ian.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: We're joined by a number of people today. As you will know, it's Equal Pay Day.

Let me start by introducing Dr. Parbudyal Singh and his family: Nirmala, Amelia and Aren. They've joined us in the gallery today.

We also have people here from the Equal Pay Coalition. Mary Cornish is here. She's the chair of the Equal Pay Coalition.

Nancy Hutchison, the OFL secretary-treasurer, is here; and Carrol Anne Sceviour, from the OFL, the director of women's issues.

Lisa Kelly is here from Unifor. She's the director of the women's department.

Barbara Wilker-Frey is from CUPE—the social services coordinator.

Juana Berinstein is from the Ontario Association of Midwives—the director of policy and communications.

From the Pay Equity Commission, we'll be joined by Emanuela Heyninck, Grace Lin, Joanna McDonald and Margaret Dwyer.

From the Workers' Action Centre are Deena Ladd and Acsana Fernando.

Mary Joe Easton is here from UFCW Local 100A.

Finally, Nancy Austin is from the Ministry of Labour, and is the executive lead on the gender wage gap committee. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NURSES

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to share the experiences of two constituents of mine, Heather and Maynard Payne, both experienced nurses who have endured nothing but frustration and delays with the College of Nurses of Ontario.

Our local hospital has an immediate requirement for a nurse with Mr. Payne's expertise. However, he has not been able to clear the obstacles at the CNO. Mr. Payne is an American-born permanent resident of Canada with 20 years' operating room experience in the United States.

Mrs. Payne was born in Canada and educated as a nurse here. They have experienced significant and unjustified delays with credential approvals and registration through the CNO. Shockingly, one of the many significant delays was a requirement for both Heather and Maynard to prove they speak English.

To further frustrate the matter, when I spoke to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration about this issue and the proposed amendments to the health professionals act, he told me it was not his department but a matter for the Minister of Health. Surprise, surprise: When I asked the Minister of Health, he told me to speak to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

How do we expect to deliver the health care our constituents deserve if the people with the skills, the training and drive to do so have to jump through unnecessary regulatory hoops and barriers, barriers like proving their proficiency in English when their first and only language is, indeed, English?

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Before long we'll be singing Solidarity Forever over on those benches.

Anyway, I want to rise today on something that's directed to the Minister of Housing. Imagine the surprise of tenants who are seniors living in Timmins at what is called the Empire Complex at 11 Spruce Street when they organized themselves as tenants into a tenant association to do two things: yes, to advocate on behalf of tenants when it comes to issues in their building, but just to get together. Sixty per cent of the people who live in that building are seniors, and they want to be able to organize themselves so that they can have a tea every now and then, enjoy each other's company and have a little bit of an opportunity to socialize with other people who live in the building.

Well, imagine the surprise when the organizers of the tenants' association get notice of eviction from the owner, a Mr. David Wall, who comes from British Columbia, who serves a notice of eviction to seniors for trying to organize essentially a tenants' association that both is able to deal with them being able to socialize but advocate for their rights.

I'm putting the government on notice because when Natrice, one of the people who was evicted, called the Ministry of Housing, they said, "Oh, he's within his rights."

When is it in your rights to kick a senior out of a building because they're trying to organize a tenants' association? I serve notice to the House and to the minister today that this is something we're going to have to resolve, and we're going to have to resolve it very quickly.

ISLINGTON HEALTH AND WELLNESS FAIR

Mr. Yvan Baker: Recently I joined constituents in my community of Etobicoke Centre in attending the

fourth annual Islington Health and Wellness Fair, sponsored by the Village of Islington BIA, the Islington Golf Club and the Etobicoke chapter of CARP. I want to thank the organizers and sponsors for continuing this annual tradition of reaching out and supporting my constituents in Etobicoke Centre.

At the fair, residents of Etobicoke had the opportunity to meet local health professionals in the community and received their expert advice on how to stay healthy and active through all ages of their life. It included organizations like the PKD Foundation, the Canadian Diabetes Association, Alzheimer Society Toronto, the Mississauga Halton CCAC, the Red Cross, Meals on Wheels, Islington Seniors' Centre, Dorothy Ley Hospice, the Etobicoke Lawn Bowling Club and others. I haven't mentioned them all—there are too many to mention—but there were so many exhibitors offering important advice to my constituents.

In a community like mine, where we have one of the highest percentages of seniors of any riding in the country, this kind of advice and this kind of support on how people can stay active and healthy is so important. The support of CARP Etobicoke in particular, both in sponsoring events like this one and in the regular work that the local chapter carries out, makes a huge difference to our seniors and their families and families who care for seniors.

The Etobicoke chapter is led by Chair Gary Hepworth. It's incredibly active and takes part in local events and in hosting regular meetings for members to discuss important issues that Canadians face as we age. This advocacy continues to make a tangible difference in the lives of my constituents and truly reflects CARP's commitment to solidarity between generations in order to build a more inclusive, healthy and civil society.

I'd like to thank all the sponsors and participants of the event and applaud CARP Etobicoke's contributions to this cause and its advocacy on behalf of seniors in my community of Etobicoke Centre.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Ted Arnott: My remarks this afternoon are addressed to the Minister of Health. I was approached a few months ago by a constituent, Barbara Selkirk, whose mother, Marlene Shields, has been diagnosed with a stage 4 glioblastoma brain tumor.

After two operations, which removed as much of the tumor as medically possible, Marlene had both radiation and chemotherapy. These treatments did little to slow the growth of the tumor. However, for a year, she received biweekly infusion treatments with Avastin. This treatment seemed to work, and MRI results showed that her tumor had stabilized.

The cost of Avastin is up to \$12,000 a month. The cost of the treatment has been covered by Marlene's husband's company's health plan, but that comes to an end at the end of this month.

We know that the cost of Avastin is covered in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. If Marlene lived

in any of these provinces, she would be assured that her treatment could continue. But because she lives in Ontario and the Ministry of Health says the manufacturer has not proven that Avastin works, the government will not fund it.

I know that the member for Dufferin—Caledon has written the minister on behalf of Marlene as well.

Time is running out. We implore the minister to personally review this matter and intervene on a compassionate basis until the manufacturer can submit additional clinical evidence that Avastin works as a treatment for this kind of cancer.

UNBOUND FASHION SHOW

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It is my pleasure to share with members of the Legislature details of the ninth annual Unbound Fashion Show, put on by the fashion design program at Fanshawe College.

Unbound, well known for its cocktail hour, catered reception, celebrity MC, fashion designers and its New-York-inspired runway, features the final collections of graduating seniors in the fashion design program. Held at Museum London, this high-profile event is juried by renowned Canadian fashion icons David Dixon and Franco Mirabelli, amongst other fashion industry leaders.

Through the fashion design program, students acquire a three-year co-operative Ontario College Advanced Diploma, which prepares them for the ever-versatile and rapidly changing fashion industry.

With this in mind, Unbound gives students the opportunity to let their talent shine and a professional venue to display their hard work. In fact, the top prize winner receives a professional portfolio, a photo shoot and a \$5,000-value subscription to Worth Global Style Network.

I would like to congratulate the graduating class of 2015. I am very proud of the creativity and passion shown in London—Fanshawe. I'm also pleased to share this achievement with all of you here today.

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SCHOOL CROSSING GUARD APPRECIATION DAY

Mr. Han Dong: I rise today to recognize and thank school crossing guards in my riding of Trinity—Spadina, the city of Toronto and all of Ontario.

Recently the city of Toronto proclaimed April 15, 2015, as School Crossing Guard Appreciation Day. I believe it is very important to thank the school crossing guards in my riding for their dedication and commitment to community safety. Thank you to the school crossing guards in Trinity—Spadina. I know you don't make a lot, but you take your job very seriously. As a parent, I want to thank you for the important work you do each and every day.

School Crossing Guard Appreciation Day provides us with an opportunity to recognize the significant contribu-

tions and important role that school crossing guards play in the safety of our children. Their work ensures the safe arrival of our children both at school in the morning and at home again at night. They play a vital role in our education system in Ontario.

I'm extremely proud of all school crossing guards in Trinity-Spadina, as the work they do, day in and day out, ensures the safety of our children. I stand today inviting all Ontarians to take a second and thank one of your local school crossing guards.

NATIONAL ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise in the House today to celebrate National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week. Anybody who has received an organ donation or knows somebody who has can't express enough how important this initiative is.

In the past I've been very fortunate to meet with Sandra Holdsworth of Gravenhurst. Sandra was the recipient of a liver transplant in 1997, and in the years since has been a volunteer and tremendous advocate for the Be A Donor initiative.

Sandra has also been a competitor at the Canadian, American and World Transplant Games and continues to be a great ambassador for the importance of organ donation. In fact, in 2011, Sandra organized a friendly competition amongst MPPs to see who might sign up the most donors.

I'm proud to say that the community of Parry Sound in my riding is currently the fifth-highest-ranked community in Ontario, with 51% of local residents being registered to be a donor. It's also worth noting that the top five communities in the ranking are all located in northern Ontario.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the dedicated volunteers in Ontario, particularly the Trillium Gift of Life Network. This week, I would ask people to take time to go online to www.beadonor.ca to verify their organ donor card and sign up to give the gift of life.

MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, I rise to tell you about a town hall I recently hosted in Kingston and the Islands to raise awareness on mental health. Mental illness is so common, so varied and the impact is so huge on society that we focused on stigma and strategies for its reduction.

The occasion was anchored by six panelists with a wealth of practical and research experience. Ruth Wilson spoke about health as a holistic package, and sickness resulting from a deficit in any one area. Family doctors already have a grasp on a person's dynamic.

Roumen Milev discussed self-stigma and when one believes the information and resists seeking help. Talking to those affected is the key to re-education.

Michael Condra presented mental health as a continuum of minor to major disruptions, and he pointed out the vulnerability of youth to risk factors such as bullying.

Heidi Penning and Ben Gooch's message was a call to action to employ persons with disabilities in inclusive environments where employees can feel safe, engaged and productive.

Craig MacFarlane spoke of Kingston Police's understanding of the importance of following up after a crisis to connect individuals with appropriate community resources.

Lastly, Madison Dorling bravely shared her lived experience with bipolar disorder.

It is my hope that the discussion brought us a little closer to accepting people with mental health conditions by recognizing negative stereotypes, stigma and discrimination. Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

TAYLOR YOUNG

Mr. Grant Crack: I rise today as a member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and on behalf of my constituents of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell to congratulate and to recognize Taylor Young, a constituent in my riding who was awarded an Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers this past Monday.

Established in 1998, the Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers honours youth between the ages of 15 and 24 who have given a large amount of their time to charitable or not-for-profit organizations or initiatives and who have inspired other young people to volunteer. The medals were presented by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

Taylor Young of Dalkeith is a gifted piper and fiddler. For almost five years he has been a member of the Glengarry Pipe Band, a community-based not-for-profit ensemble, volunteering his musical talents at many local community events. He has made significant contributions to the Celtic community in Glengarry county, actively encouraging other young people to embrace and promote local Celtic traditions and culture.

I'm extremely proud of Taylor for being awarded this important distinction in recognition of his significant contribution and dedication to volunteer service. He is truly an exceptional young Ontarian. Again, congratulations, Taylor.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to thank all members for their statements.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you'll find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader seeks unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item number 49 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 49 be waived. Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EQUAL PAY DAY

JOURNÉE DE L'ÉQUITÉ SALARIALE

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise in the House today to recognize April 20 as Equal Pay Day in Ontario. This is the day that's calculated each year in countries around the world to mark the extra time it takes a woman to earn as much money as a man.

I want to acknowledge the advocates, community leaders and those who work each and every day to end wage disparity. I'd like to particularly recognize the leadership of Emanuela Heyninck, Ontario's Pay Equity Commissioner, and extend a thank you to her from the people of Ontario to both herself and her staff at the Pay Equity Office.

Today, we recognize the critical role that women play in our economy. While we reflect on the sombre reality that women continue to earn less on average than men in our society do, Equal Pay Day is a reminder that we must dedicate ourselves to ending this discrimination and ensuring that the great contributions that women make to our society, economy and the province of Ontario are fully valued and fully recognized.

That's why, in the Premier's mandate letter to me, she asked that I work with the minister responsible for women's issues, the Honourable Tracy MacCharles, to lead the development of a wage gap strategy that will close the gap between men and women in the context of a 21st-century economy. It's an important task and it's one that Minister MacCharles and I look forward to tackling and making progress on.

Over the past several years, our government has taken many steps to improve the lives of women across Ontario. Some examples: the Ontario Women's Directorate created a Microlending for Women in Ontario program. It has helped more than 900 low-income women both build and grow their businesses.

But we're also paying particular attention to supporting low-income women. As a result of initiatives undertaken through the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the child poverty rate in single-mother-led families has dropped from 44% to 36% in just two years. In addition, as of July 2014, the Ontario Child Benefit was increased to a maximum of \$1,310 per child per year. That's more than double the maximum benefit that was available in 2009.

We've invested significantly in child care, and we continue to implement full-day kindergarten. This helps women participate in the workforce while, at the same time, they know that their children are well cared for.

We've increased the minimum wage eight times since 2003. The ninth increase is coming into effect on October 1 of this year.

Since 2003, more than 2,200 women have participated in training through the Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training Program. This program gives low-income women the training they need to get those well-paying jobs.

Last month, Premier Wynne and Minister MacCharles released the sexual violence and harassment action plan for the province of Ontario. The plan will be implemented through numerous ministries, including the Ministry of Labour. The goal is to combat and to raise awareness of sexual violence, harassment and discrimination, and improve support for survivors in Ontario.

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Like closing the wage gap, these initiatives are steps towards increased fairness. We know that fairness for women in Ontario is about more than just money; it's about freedom from harassment, freedom from abuse, and it's about equality of opportunity. We're not there yet, Speaker, but we are making progress.

Today we're taking another big step in the right direction. Today my ministry is announcing that we have appointed two outstanding Ontarians as external advisers to the government's new Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee. One of those people is Linda Davis. Linda is the past president of the Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Ontario, of which she is currently an executive board member. She's also the board's Equal Pay Coalition representative.

Dr. Parbudyal Singh is a professor of human resource management at York University right here in Toronto and has joined us today in the members' gallery. Dr. Singh's research covers emerging issues in human resources management and labour relations.

Ms. Davis and Dr. Singh will be joining with Ontario's Pay Equity Commissioner, Emanuela Heyninck, and my ministry's wage gap strategy executive lead, Nancy Austin, both of whom have joined us in the members' gallery.

Speaker, the Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee will conduct provincial consultation sessions in 2015. They're going to develop recommendations that will create a strategy aimed at closing the gender wage gap through the actions of business, government, labour and all Ontarians.

Our government is committed to women's equality in the province of Ontario. We're increasing women's economic opportunities. We're removing barriers that in the past have prevented full participation by women in the labour force.

The gender wage gap strategy that the steering committee will draft will build on the progress to date and will significantly improve economic outcomes for On-

tario women and of the province of Ontario as a whole. I look forward to receiving the committee's recommendations in spring of next year, after their consultations have been completed.

Speaker, by acknowledging this day, Ontario joins others around the world in recognizing that while we've made progress, this inequality still exists and we have a lot more work to do.

Ontario's women include innovators, scientists, teachers, CEOs and, I'm incredibly proud to say, the leaders of political parties and the Premier of Ontario. Yet as long as there's a wage gap, we all have work to do. The truth is, Equal Pay Day is a day that simply should not exist in the province of Ontario. Recognizing the value of the work that women do contributes to a more equal, a more just and a more prosperous society.

Our goal is an Ontario where men and women have equal opportunity to achieve their full potential within a modern workplace and become contributors to Ontario's continued economic growth. There's no other way to put it: Closing the gender wage gap in the province of Ontario is a necessary part of this goal.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize Equal Pay Day. I speak not only as a woman, but as a daughter, sister, mother, optometrist and member of Parliament.

I want to share the comments by actress Patricia Arquette while receiving her Oscar this past year: "To every woman who gave birth, to every taxpayer and citizen of this nation, we have fought for everybody else's equal rights. It's time to have wage equality once and for all. And equal rights for women."

I won't debate whether the Oscars should be used to express political commentary, but I commend Ms. Arquette for her comments while supporting her sentiment. It is time to work together to bring an end to the gender gap.

In an industry that tends to give female actors limited roles based on sexist ideals and a masculine hierarchy such as breadwinner or caregiver, her remarks unleashed a wave of agreement across the globe.

It is now our responsibility to reduce the wage gap and create laws that support a healthy balance between work and family life. The world economy has shown us time and time again that women's equality leads to job creation and economic expansion that benefit the entire population. We must act together to improve women's work spaces and lives and finally open the door of opportunity to all women.

J'aimerais faire part à mes collègues des commentaires de l'actrice Patricia Arquette après avoir gagné l'oscar du meilleur second rôle féminin. En acceptant les louanges avec humilité et grâce, M^{me} Arquette a proclamé : « À chaque femme qui a donné la vie, à chaque citoyen qui a payé ses impôts, je dis ceci : Nous nous sommes battus pour avoir des droits égaux. Le temps est venu pour nous d'avoir une égalité salariale entre les hommes et les femmes. »

Chez une industrie qui a tendance à donner aux actrices des rôles limités basés sur le sexisme et une hiérarchie masculine tels que la principale dispensatrice de soins ou celui d'un observateur passif, ses remarques ont déclenché une vague d'accord en tous points de la Terre.

C'est à notre tour de minimiser les écarts de salaire et créer des lois qui vont améliorer le climat de travail et favoriser l'équilibre entre le travail et la vie familiale. L'économie mondiale nous démontre clairement que l'égalité des femmes mène à la création d'emplois et d'investissements et profite à bon nombre de gens. Il faut agir ensemble pour améliorer la condition féminine et pour ouvrir grand enfin la porte à l'opportunité à toutes les femmes.

Pay equity, also known as equal pay for work of equal value, is a fundamental human right. The goal is to stop discrimination related to the undervaluation of work traditionally performed by women.

It was back in 1987 that this province introduced the Ontario Pay Equity Act as the first important step in recognizing the equal value of women's work and eliminating discrimination in the workforce. While it is important to reflect on the progress that has been made in this province and all across the country, we are still not seeing adequately positive results. Legislation now requires employers to take steps to ensure that both women and men are paid on the same basis—fantastic for women who work in professions with good monetary value, while failing to address the serious problems in women-dominated professions.

Through the combined efforts of the general public, businesses and government, and all the activists as well, more awareness has been created about the causes of the wage gap. Concrete steps are required to better address and ultimately close the gap. Our PC caucus has strongly advocated for a government that helps create a fair, productive and sustainable society for all. We are proud to support the capable and intelligent women who contribute to our society.

Although pay equity is the law in Ontario, women, on average, still earn 31% less than men. As a result, women in Ontario have to work longer to earn what men earn in terms of average annual earnings. This pay gap affects women of all ages and education levels and has an even greater effect on racialized women, women with disabilities and aboriginal women. There are many statistics out there of women receiving less pay. I know that the women in my riding are valued members of the workforce, and this should be reflected in equal pay to them.

Mr. Speaker, many of us in the room are expecting to see three strong female parliamentarians leading our three parties in just a few weeks. Just as a female Premier was historic, three female leaders will be unprecedented in our province.

Strong women, strong society, strong families and a strong province of Ontario.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, Monday, April 20 marks Equal Pay Day in 2015. I use the word "mark" advisedly

because, unlike many of the days we recognize in this House, Equal Pay Day is no cause for celebration. The day represents how far into the next year a woman in Ontario must work in order to earn the same salary that a man did the year before. In order to earn what a man was paid in 2014, a woman must work those 12 months plus all of January, all of February, all of March and most of April.

Since 2013, thanks to the advocacy of the Equal Pay Coalition, many of whom are here today, as well as the efforts of Ontario New Democrats, in particular my colleague the member for Parkdale–High Park, Equal Pay Day has been observed in this province.

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When it was first introduced, Equal Pay Day fell on April 9. Last year, it fell one week later, on April 16. This year, it falls later still. What does this tell us? It tells us that the gap is widening, not closing; that the problem is getting worse, not better; and that women are falling further behind, especially women who are racialized, women who are living with disabilities, indigenous women and newcomer women.

Speaker, in 2010, women in Ontario made 72 cents for every dollar earned by men. Today, the gender pay gap has increased to 31.5%. This is a fundamental injustice. It is both a human rights issue and a major barrier to Ontario's economic and social well-being. Over the course of their lifetime, when women earn about one third less than men, they must work until they are 79 years old to make what men earn by the time they turn 65. That is 14 years longer. Since most women do not keep working until they turn 79, they end their years in poverty and are twice as likely to be poor as senior men.

As women's issues critic for the NDP caucus, I can tell you that Ontario women want to see more than the striking of a panel. They want to see action and change. New Democrats will be watching carefully to make sure that the government delivers on its commitment to close the gap, but based on past experience, it's hard not to be skeptical about the Liberals' promise to carry this through. We've seen a Pay Equity Act that the Liberals have consistently refused to honour, especially in the case of midwives; an Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act that they have refused to enforce; and a Poverty Reduction Strategy that provides no funding and no targets.

We know that eliminating the wage gap will require a significant change to the way government operates—an end to their reliance on undervalued women's work for the delivery of government services, as well as a major commitment of funding—so we're going to hold off on the applause until we see some real resources allocated and some tangible progress made.

We'll also be watching for a gender lens in the minister's other initiative on labour laws and precarious work, because we know that a major contributor to the gender wage gap is the number of Ontario women who work part-time, even when they would rather be working full-time; the number of women who can only find

temporary jobs, contract jobs or minimum wage jobs; and the number of women who can't find any paid employment at all.

Speaker, we already know what needs to be done. We need strategies to improve women's access to collective bargaining and their rights to unionize. We need more quality, affordable and accessible child care spaces, not less, and greater access to paid parental leave, family leave and sick leave. While these kinds of policies will benefit all workers, they will benefit women in particular, given that women tend to carry the burden of family care responsibilities.

In the lead-up to this day, 18 MPPs signed pledges to be pay equity champions—all of them New Democrats, which comes as no surprise, since the majority of our caucus are women. I want to applaud the efforts of the Equal Pay Coalition to raise awareness among MPPs and to enlist our support. New Democrat MPPs did not sign that pledge lightly. We recognize the human rights of women to have their labour valued equally to men's. We also recognize the tremendous economic stimulus, the boost to Ontario's economy and the benefits to our communities that would result from ending pay discrimination.

In closing, a consultation more than a decade after the Liberals formed government is long overdue. While a panel is nice, New Democrats will continue to push for legislation, policies and funding that will enable men and women in Ontario to reach their full economic potential and participate as true equals in our province and our society.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, last Friday I had the opportunity to go to Tillsonburg to recognize volunteers at Community Living Ontario and People First. They presented me with this petition, and I'd like to present it on their behalf.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the \$100 ODSP Work-Related Benefit provides a critically important source of funds to people with disabilities on ODSP who work, giving them the ability to pay for much-needed, ongoing work-related expenses such as transportation, clothing, food, personal care and hygiene items, and child care; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Community and Social Services plans to eliminate the Work-Related Benefit as part of a restructuring of OW and ODSP employment benefits, and has said that ongoing work-related expenses will not be covered by its new restructured Employment-Related Benefit; and

"Whereas eliminating the Work-Related Benefit will take approximately \$36 million annually out of the

pockets of people with disabilities on ODSP who work; and

“Whereas a survey conducted by the ODSP Action Coalition between December 2014 and February 2015 shows that 18% of respondents who currently receive the Work-Related Benefit fear having to quit their jobs as a result of the loss of this important source of funds; 12.5% fear having to reduce the amount of money they spend on food, or rely on food banks; and 10% fear losing the ability to travel, due to the cost of transportation; and

“Whereas people receiving ODSP already struggle to get by, and incomes on ODSP provide them with little or no ability to cover these costs from regular benefits; and

“Whereas undermining employment among ODSP recipients would run directly counter to the ministry’s goal of increasing employment and the provincial government’s poverty reduction goal of increasing income security;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the provincial government’s plan to eliminate the ODSP Work-Related Benefit.”

Thank you very much for allowing me the time. I affix my signature, as I agree with this petition.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas emergency response workers (firefighters, police officers and paramedics) confront traumatic events on a near daily basis to provide safety to the public;

“Whereas many emergency response workers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their work;

“Whereas emergency response workers go through painstaking steps in order to receive WSIB benefits based on post-traumatic stress acquired while serving the public;

“Whereas Bill 2, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder, sets out that if an emergency response worker suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder it is presumed that they acquired the illness on the job, unless the contrary is shown;

“Whereas the change would ease the process for receiving benefits for emergency response workers with post-traumatic stress disorder arising out of work;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to unanimously endorse and quickly pass Bill 2, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder.”

I couldn’t agree more, sign my name with the thousands and give it to Ryan to deliver.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

“Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

“Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers.”

I agree with this, affix my signature and give it to page Mira.

ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES

Mr. Randy Hillier: I have a petition that’s signed by over 2,700 people since last week. It’s a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas electronic cigarettes, more accurately known as vaporizers, are between 95% and 99% cleaner than smoking tobacco; and

“Whereas electronic cigarettes are not a tobacco product, but rather a tobacco replacement therapy for those wishing to quit smoking, and a significant contributor to tobacco harm reduction in Ontario; and

“Whereas there is no scientific or medical evidence indicating that vaping causes inhalable exposure to contaminants that warrants health concerns;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario abandon schedule 3 of Bill 45, Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2014.”

I agree with that petition and will hand it to page Thomas.

ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Mr. Michael Mantha: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease is a degenerative brain disease that causes thinking and memory impairment. Alzheimer’s disease is progressive, worsens over time and will eventually lead to death;

“Whereas there are an estimated 208,000 Ontarians diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and related dementia today, and that number is set to increase by 40% in the next 10 years;

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease creates emotional, social and economic burdens on the family and supports of those suffering with the disease—over 25% of those providing personal supports to survivors of Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia are seniors;

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“Whereas the total economic burden of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than \$770 million per year through to 2020; and

"Whereas Ontario's strategy for Alzheimer's disease and related dementia has not been revised since the implementation of a five-year strategy in 1999;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to immediately review, revise and implement an updated, research-informed, comprehensive strategy to respond to and prepare for the rapidly growing needs of those living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia."

I agree with this petition and present it to page Misha to bring it down to the Clerks' table.

FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

"Whereas section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees access to publicly funded French-language education; and

"Whereas there are more than 1,000 children attending French elementary schools in east Toronto (Beaches-East York and Toronto-Danforth) and those numbers continue to grow; and

"Whereas there is no French secondary school (grades 7-12) yet in east Toronto, requiring students wishing to continue their studies in French school boards to travel two hours every day to attend the closest French secondary school, while several English schools in east Toronto sit half-empty since there are no requirements or incentives for school boards to release underutilized schools to other boards in need; and

"Whereas it is well documented that children leave the French-language system for the English-language system between grades 7 and 9 due to the inaccessibility of French-language secondary schools, and that it is also well established that being educated in French at the elementary level is not sufficient to solidify French-language skills for life; and

"Whereas the Ontario government acknowledged in February 2007 that there is an important shortage of French-language schools in all of Toronto and even provided funds to open some secondary schools, and yet, not a single French secondary school has opened in east Toronto; and

"Whereas the commissioner of French-language services stated in a report in June 2011 that '... time is running out to address the serious shortage of at least one new French-language school at the secondary level in the eastern part of the city of Toronto'; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Education has confirmed that we all benefit when school board properties are used effectively in support of publicly funded education and that the various components of our education system should be aligned to serve the needs of students; and

"Whereas parents and students from both French Catholic and French public elementary schools in east Toronto are expected to find common ground across all language school systems to secure space for a French-language secondary school in east Toronto;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Education assist one or both French school boards in locating a suitable underutilized school building in east Toronto that may be sold or shared for the purpose of opening a French secondary school (grades 7-12) in the community by September 2015, so that French students have a secondary school close to where they live."

I agree with this petition and I affix my name—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Further petitions?

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition received from Parry Sound Bikes and from the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas both provincial Highway 559 (from Nobel Road to Killbear Park) and Highway 124 (from Parry Sound to McKellar) are busy roads with fast-moving vehicles and no paved shoulders; and

"Whereas drivers, cyclists and pedestrians are put at safety risks on these stretches of highway between Carling, McDougall and McKellar which are the only routes available; and

"Whereas maintaining unpaved highway shoulders is costly; and

"Whereas area residents and visitors are increasingly using secondary provincial highways to support healthy lifestyles, reduce health care costs and contribute to positive economic development;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To install paved shoulders on Highways 559 and 124 at the earliest possible opportunity, consistent with the 2013 Ontario cycling strategy that promotes safe, sustainable transportation."

I support this petition and have signed it.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was gathered by Jim Reid, from my riding. He collected 480 names on the petition, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the NDP MPP for Timiskaming-Cochrane, John Vanthof, has introduced Bill 46 in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario so that UTVs (utility task vehicles) would be treated like all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) by the Highway Traffic Act;

"Whereas this bill to amend the Highway Traffic Act in respect to UTVs was introduced on November 24, 2014;

"Whereas this bill will have positive economic impact on clubs, manufacturers, dealers and rental shops and will boost revenues to communities promoting this outdoor activity;,"

They ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To vote in favour of MPP Vanthof's Bill 46 to allow UTVs the same access as ATVs in the Highway Traffic Act."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Colton to bring it to the Clerk.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise in the House to read this petition that's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

"Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers' resources;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario's economy and create jobs in three ways:

"—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

"—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

"—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries."

I agree with this petition. I'm going to affix my name and send it down to the table with page Misha from my riding of Davenport.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas it has been over a decade since regulation 316/03 of the Highway Traffic Act has been updated to recognize new classes of off-road vehicles and a motion to do so passed on November 7, 2013, with unanimous support of the provincial Legislature;

"Whereas owners of two-up ATVs and side-by-side UTVs deserve clarity in knowing which roadways and trails are legal for use of these off-road vehicles; and

"Whereas owners should be able to legally use their vehicles to access woodlots, trails and hunting and fishing destinations;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That private member's Bill 58, which seeks to update the Highway Traffic Act to include new classes of all-terrain and utility task vehicles, receive swift passage through the Legislature."

I'm pleased to support Mr. Miller's private member's bill. I'll affix my signature to the petition and send it to the table with page Thomas.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain that cause thinking, memory and physical functioning to become seriously impaired;

"Whereas there is no known cause or cure for this devastating illness; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias also take their toll on hundreds of thousands of families and care partners; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias affect more than 200,000 Ontarians today, with an annual total economic burden rising to \$15.7 billion by 2020; and

"Whereas the cost related to the health care system is in the billions and only going to increase, at a time when our health care system is already facing enormous financial challenges; and

"Whereas there is work under way to address the need, but no coordinated or comprehensive approach to tackling the issues; and

"Whereas there is an urgent need to plan and raise awareness and understanding about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias for the sake of improving the quality of life of the people it touches;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To approve the development of a comprehensive Ontario dementia plan that would include the development of strategies in primary health care, in health promotion and prevention of illness, in community development, in building community capacity and care partner engagement, in caregiver support and investments in research."

I totally support this petition, affix my name to it and will give it to page Ethan to take to the table.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

Speaker, I agree with this petition, affix my name and give it to page Samantha.

1350

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to inform the House that I earlier made a statement, and I'm glad to report that the landlord is not evicting anybody from the building. They're allowed to have a tenant's association and to post notice to people in order to be able to attend. I want to thank the co-operation of the landlord and everybody involved.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have available today for petitions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POOLED REGISTERED PENSION PLANS ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LES RÉGIMES DE PENSION AGRÉÉS COLLECTIFS

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 15, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 57, Loi créant un cadre pour les régimes de pension agréés collectifs et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 16, 2015, I am now required to put the question.

On March 25, Mr. Sousa moved second reading of Bill 57. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

I wish to inform the House that I have received from the chief government whip a notice of deferral of this

vote. It will now take place at the time of deferred votes tomorrow, Tuesday, April 21, 2015.

Second reading vote deferred.

VISITORS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I wish to inform the House that with us today in the Speaker's gallery we have a group of Franco-Ontarians who have been selected by an all-party panel of members to receive l'Ordre de la Pléiade, the internationally recognized medal of la Francophonie. These individuals are being recognized for their outstanding contributions to French-speaking communities in the province.

The recipients are Monsieur Ernest Côté, whose daughter Denyse will be accepting on his behalf, Madame Lyse Lamothe, Madame Nicole Larocque, Monsieur Sébastien Lorquet, Monsieur Didier Marotte, and Madame Bettina Setton. Bienvenue.

Please join me in welcoming our honoured guests to Queen's Park.

The member for Nickel Belt on a point of order.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I beg the indulgence of the House. One of the recipients, Lyse Lamothe, is from my riding, and she came with friends from Sudbury. I'd like to recognize Lynn Michel, Robert Blais and Joanne Gervais and welcome them to Queen's Park. They made the trip in the pouring rain, so I wanted to thank them for their effort.

TRANSPORTATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (MAKING ONTARIO'S ROADS SAFER), 2015 LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE TRANSPORT (ACCROÎTRE LA SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE EN ONTARIO)

Ms. Sandals, on behalf of Mr. Del Duca, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 31, An Act to amend the Highway 407 East Act, 2012 and the Highway Traffic Act in respect of various matters and to make a consequential amendment to the Provincial Offences Act / Projet de loi 31, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2012 sur l'autoroute 407 Est et le Code de la route en ce qui concerne diverses questions et apportant une modification corrélative à la Loi sur les infractions provinciales.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I will be sharing my time with the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, the member from Cambridge, and also the members from Northumberland–Quinte West, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Etobicoke Centre and Scarborough–Rouge River.

Just to lead off here briefly on Bill 31, the Transportation Statute Law Amendment Act, Bill 31 is a key piece of a broader legislative package which includes subse-

quent regulatory amendments to the Highway Traffic Act, the Provincial Offences Act and the Highway 407 East Act. It does a number of things. The objectives are: to improve road safety; to enhance the collection of defaulted Provincial Offences Act fines, or POA fines, as they are often called; to improve the Highway 407 East Act; and to address a number of outstanding housekeeping proposals.

Some of the proposals address things like: improvement related to impaired driving, both with respect to drugs and with respect to alcohol; dealing more effectively with distracted driving; addressing the issue more completely of medically unfit drivers; dealing with truck, vehicle and bus safety; pedestrian safety; cyclist safety; as I mentioned, the collection of the POA fines; and also some of the infrastructure around Highway 407 east.

I wanted to comment briefly on drivers with medical conditions, because for those of us who are MPPs this also often becomes an issue in our constituency offices. There is a lot of confusion around what happens when often an older person is becoming medically unfit to drive. The amendments that are before us here today would enable the expansion of medical reporting requirements to additional qualified health practitioners. That is, right now it's only doctors, but if it happens to be a nurse practitioner or someone like that who is encountering the medical condition, we want to make sure that an expanded list of medical practitioners can report.

We need to clarify the mandatory and discretionary reporting requirements. That will be done more completely in a future regulation.

We need to set up what specific driver information must be provided by mandating the use of specific forms. I know we often find in my constituency office that somebody will come in and say, "Why haven't I got my licence back? The doctor sent the information." Then when we track it down, we find out the doctor hasn't really sent the required information at all. They did send a letter, but it didn't include the required form or at least the required information. Having a standard form will just help expedite the whole process.

The other thing that we often hear from constituents who have some sort of temporary medical problem that will be addressed by surgery or some form of medical treatment is that the current requirement to send your licence back just actually makes things way more complicated because by the time they have been notified that they are to send the licence back, in fact the medical problem should be fixed and they should have it reinstated. We're going to clarify how that works and get rid of the business of demanding that drivers always send the licence back. That is one of the things that is being addressed.

Another thing, under the category of truck, bus and vehicle safety, that I must comment on is clarifying that school buses are the only buses permitted to be painted the classic chrome yellow. It prohibits the use of chrome yellow paint in whole or in part on any bus except a school bus. We want to make sure that when people see

that chrome yellow bus, they know that they are seeing a school bus.

1400

What sometimes happens is that school buses which have been legitimately school buses at some point of their life reach the end of the safety window for the age for a school bus and get sold to a private owner, and they don't really get repainted. It becomes quite confusing that you have things that look like school buses but really aren't school buses anymore. So we actually do encourage fluorescent pink or whatever for former school buses. Because we actually want people to understand that this vehicle is no longer a school bus, you would be prohibited from keeping that original chrome yellow paint job.

I'm now going to turn it over to the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation to explain things much more completely.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Cambridge.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Speaker, for the past 13 years, Ontario's roads have consistently ranked either first or second in road safety in North America. We are a recognized world-class leader in road safety because of our tough laws, our strong enforcement and the dedicated work of our many road safety partners, who are very engaged with this process around Bill 31.

Keeping our roads safe for everyone—drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, passengers—remains a top, key priority for this government. However, despite Ontario's record of success, there's still more that the province can do to improve its road safety programs.

Last year, Minister Del Duca introduced new legislation for making Ontario's roads safer that, if passed, would help ensure that Ontario remains a leader in road safety. If passed, this legislation and subsequent amendments will help reduce collisions, injuries and fatalities across Ontario, and assist municipalities to collect unpaid Provincial Offences Act fines, all the while improving the safety of road users. It would be one more step in giving the people of Ontario healthier, more convenient and safer options on how to get around.

This legislation, if passed, would improve measures to address drivers who repeatedly drink and drive, by requiring them to complete intensive alcohol education, treatment and monitoring programs. It also proposes to apply alcohol-impaired sanctions to drivers who are drug-impaired. That's very important, because recent statistics show that over 45% of drivers who have been killed in Ontario were found to have drugs or a combination of drugs and alcohol in their system. Certainly in my past as an emergency room nurse, I can speak to the number of folks I saw coming through the emergency department who certainly had drugs and alcohol in their systems, and that was subsequently a cause for their collision.

It's also a part of our strong legacy on combatting impaired driving. This legacy will include tough penalties such as licence suspensions, immediate vehicle impoundment, requirements for ignition interlock and

escalating sanctions for drivers with a blood alcohol concentration in the warn range.

Although recent statistics show that Ontario's fatality rate for licensed drivers is the lowest ever recorded, on average, one person is killed on our roads every 18 hours. That's one more important reason we're going to target those drivers who still are not getting the message and continue to use their cellphones while driving. We are proposing to increase the fines, which are \$60 to \$500, to \$300 to \$1,000 going forward, and we also plan to introduce three demerit points upon conviction and add a distracted driving prohibition to the graduated licensing system.

We were one of the first to take action on distracted driving, in 2009, by banning the use of handheld devices, and we're going to continue to take action today and in the future. The evidence speaks for itself. A driver who uses a cellphone, Speaker, is four times more likely to be in a crash, and if current trends continue, fatalities from distracted driving may exceed those from drinking and driving by 2016. Make no mistake: Safe driving requires undivided attention.

In my conversations around Bill 31 recently with our stakeholders in Waterloo, I had a conversation with Chief Larkin of the Waterloo Regional Police Services, who endorses increased fines and demerit points for distracted driving. This is a key program in Waterloo region that our police are on the lookout for, something that Staff Sergeant Ray Ward endorses as well. He states that his police officers have learned to look for drivers with their heads down at intersections at red lights because very often they are looking at their cellphones. He says that even though the vehicle is stopped, they are in a live lane of traffic and must keep attention.

Public education will be a big part of our work going forward. We're going to work with all of our road safety partners to make sure that distracted drivers get the message: Keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.

The legislation also looks to see what we can do to improve pedestrian safety. Although the good news is that the number of pedestrians who have been killed has declined significantly over the last 25 years, pedestrians still represent about one in five of all motor-vehicle-related fatalities in Ontario, and 46% of these fatalities actually occur at intersections. That's too many.

In response to the coroner's office recommendations and to municipal requests, the legislation, if passed, would require drivers to yield the whole roadway to pedestrians at school crossings and pedestrian crossovers. It would also support the use of new pedestrian crossing devices.

We know that there are other choices to help people get around. Healthy choices, such as cycling, walking and all other kinds of active transportation, are all part and parcel of a full range of solutions to address congestion and improve air quality. Those who are suffering with lung disease are less likely to need emergency visits if we have fewer cars on the road and our air quality continues to improve in Ontario.

If passed, the legislation would build CycleON, Ontario's 20-year cycling strategy, to become the best Canadian province for cycling. That's great for increasing tourism benefits as well as health benefits, and also by decreasing some of our traffic congestion.

This legislation, if passed, would increase fines and demerits for drivers who "door" cyclists—those who open the door while cyclists are nearby. Where practical, it also requires drivers to keep a minimum distance of one metre between their vehicles and cyclists when passing.

This legislation would also support cycling on paved shoulders of unrestricted provincial highways and in contraflow bicycle lanes in urban centres to give cyclists more choices on how and where to travel.

We know that the younger population, known as millennials, are certainly looking to these modes of active transportation to cut down on urban traffic congestion, decrease their costs and increase their health benefits. These are the folks who are really pushing for this legislation.

In addition, if passed, this legislation would allow us to update our mandatory medical reporting program. Ontario's mandatory reporting program for physicians is a key method of identifying drivers of any age with a medical condition that may make it unsafe for them to drive, something I used to see in my work as a nurse, especially in the emergency department. We would focus on those individuals who had health conditions or medical conditions that would make it unsafe for them to drive—not only for themselves and their passengers but others on the road.

Future regulations could allow us to accept recommendations from a broader range of qualified medical professionals, a measure that responds to requests from the medical community about our mandatory medical reporting program. These changes would also help to keep our medical reporting program among the most stringent in North America and serve to help quickly remove unsafe drivers from our roads.

The legislation will also, if passed, respond to municipal requests for more assistance in collecting unpaid Provincial Offences Act fines. We would put yet another tool in the hands of those municipalities to help collect fines and keep municipal roads safe. Certainly in my conversations with Regional Chair Ken Seiling of Waterloo region and Mayor Doug Craig, as early as this morning, they are very, very much looking forward to collecting the fines. In Waterloo region alone, there is \$39 million of outstanding fines that they are very anxious to collect, to be able to put back into municipal programs.

1410

If passed, this would represent a major step forward in helping all of our municipal partners collect the money that is owed to them. The bill could allow any municipality that chooses to use this fine-collecting tool to direct the MTO to not only suspend drivers' licences, but also to deny all vehicle plates registered to an

individual who has defaulted on driving-related POA fines.

One thing I'm very excited about in this bill is that we're also proposing to improve the safety of tow truck drivers in our province. Often overlooked, in terms of road safety, these are unsung heroes who deserve to be safe when doing their important role of rescuing drivers and their vehicles on our highways. Tow truck drivers can face significant risk when helping motorists on the roadsides of busy highways. If passed, motorists would be required to slow down and, if safe to do so, move over—as is the case with police officers and other emergency respondents—when they approach stopped tow trucks with flashing amber lights on the roadside.

These changes, and numerous others we're proposing, recognize that everyone, from the most vulnerable to the most seasoned, needs to feel safe and protected on our roads and highways. Unsafe drivers and vehicles have no place on Ontario's roads. The people of Ontario deserve no less. We are a North American leader in road safety in Ontario, and we are certainly committed to keeping it that way. I urge all members of this House to support this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a real pleasure to spend a few minutes to talk about Bill 31. I'm going to focus in a little bit more detail on what the meat of the bill is. Bill 31, really, is a combination of former Bill 34 and Bill 173, both introduced in 2013-14. Due to an election last June, they kind of fell to the side. Both of these bills were combined into Bill 31, frankly with some enhancements. What I want to chat about for a few minutes is a little more specific on those enhancements.

As you heard from my colleagues, one of the planks of the bill is to deal with distracted drivers. With today's technology, Speaker, I will admit that it's sometimes very, very hard not to look at your device as you're driving, because it's buzzing or vibrating and those things, but we do have to learn. What the legislation, if passed, proposes will happen on the distracted driving piece is that it would increase fines from \$60 to \$500, to \$300 to \$1,000. You know the saying we are all accustomed to: Money talks. Hopefully this makes drivers listen.

The other piece is that it will take away three demerit points. Once again, this will hopefully deter people from not paying attention. Speaker, I know that you drive quite a distance to get here, and I know I do. It took three and a half hours this morning. But sometimes it's not because of my action; we have to be cognizant of somebody else's actions and be alert to prevent that incident.

The other piece that we want to talk about is impaired driving. That has always been a problem. Presently the requirement for alcohol content ranges from 0.05 to 0.08. Extending that will only deter people from driving. This will also include suspension of licences for up to 90 days.

I would say that Ontario has got some of the safest roads, and these are just measures to maintain that.

The other piece that the bill touches on is a driver with medical conditions. This will enable expansion of medical reporting requirements to additional qualified health practitioners, clarification of mandatory and discretionary reporting requirements in future regulation, and set out what specific driver information must be provided by mandating the use of standardized reporting forms.

It also would improve customer service for drivers with medical conditions by allowing the drivers to keep their licence so that when they're back healthy again, it's a little bit easier to regain their driving privileges.

We heard also at the beginning from one of my colleagues about keeping that school bus yellow that we've all become so familiar with. It's retained for school bus purposes only, so by allowing that reflective yellow that we use on buses now—and only for buses—it's ingrained in our minds.

Also, this would allow B-train double trailers—I'm sure you've seen them, Speaker, as you drive the 401, the 400 or most four-lane highways: the extra-long transport trailers, the double ones. This would allow the extension of those trailers' total length from 25 metres to 27.5 metres.

These are all enhancements that will certainly help our economy as we move goods across this province.

When it comes to pedestrians: Require drivers to yield the whole roadway to pedestrians at school crossings and pedestrian crossovers.

Also, the introduction of new pedestrian crossing devices for low-speed and low-volume roads: Once again, this will combine added features when we are dealing with pedestrians.

On the POA and making municipalities able to collect POA fines, let me just say that I was in the municipal sector when the former government—I wouldn't say downloaded; it would be uploaded, because it was one of those revenue tools for municipalities. I remember it distinctly; that was a big gift when all the downloading was happening, but frankly, the ability to collect wasn't there. It was in big print; it looked good. I can tell you, in every municipality—in our case it's the county; it goes down to the lower tier—there were millions of dollars in uncollected fines. I can tell you, at every opportunity that I get to chat, either at AMO or Good Roads, or with my own municipal leaders, that's one of the things that they bring to the table because the cost of doing business in government, all governments, is increasing. Anything that they can do to enhance their ability to collect some money—this is money from people who broke the law. It's not extra taxation. It's something that, if you break the law, you pay a fine. Unfortunately, right now they cannot do that.

I'm going to close by saying that there are a lot of things here that I think are good for our environment. It's good for our economics. It's good for the safety of the roads. Let's get this piece of legislation in the books and let's put it to work.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act. I want to thank the Minister of Education and the members for Cambridge and Northumberland—Quinte West for their additions to the debate so far this afternoon.

1420

Mr. Speaker, Bill 31 not only serves to protect drivers on our roads; it also introduces a number of provisions that will help keep pedestrians and cyclists safe in Ontario. Keeping our roads safe has always been a top priority for this government. I know that safe roads for drivers and cyclists is of great importance to my constituents in the riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore, as it is, indeed, for all Ontarians. That is why this bill has so much support, even outside of the Legislature.

The Ministry of Transportation did almost unprecedented consultation with stakeholders across the province in developing this legislation. They spoke to commercial vehicle operators: CUTA, OPTA, OMCA, OSBA, ORBA, the Teamsters and the Canadian Trucking Alliance. They spoke to the insurance industry. They spoke to the automotive industry: the Automotive Aftermarket Retailers of Ontario and the car manufacturers. They spoke to all of our key partners in road safety, such as Arrive Alive Drive Sober, MADD Canada, the Ontario Safety League and the CAA. The Ministry of Transportation consulted very broadly with cycling stakeholders throughout the province.

It's very important that we did this consultation, so that we could come up with a piece of legislation that will indeed have the effect that we seek to have. But we also spoke to our municipal partners, both through their organizations as well as individual municipalities, to ensure that the bill could be implemented effectively.

In particular, we spoke with municipalities about collecting defaulted fines, as the member from Northumberland—Quinte West mentioned. We appreciate the challenges faced by municipalities in trying to collect these fines. Over the years, the province has given municipalities more enforcement tools, including the ability to order licence suspensions for driving-related defaulted fines and plate denial for selected vehicle-based defaulted fines. This bill, if passed, would make various improvements to the fine-collection tools and processes available to municipalities. Perhaps most importantly, Bill 31 would expand the existing plate denial system to deny all licence plates of individuals who receive a licence suspension for defaulted fines under this system.

We also consulted with the towing industry. The proposed legislation extends the "slow down, move over" law to allow tow trucks that are stopped on the roadside with their amber lights flashing to safely do their work. This reflects the need to ensure safety on the roads for those who have already had a vehicle breakdown.

We consulted with the enforcement community, with our police services, as well as with the public.

We're very blessed in Ontario to consistently have had either the safest or the second-safest roads in North America for the past 13 years. This is something that my

constituents in Etobicoke—Lakeshore are rightly proud of, as well as Ontarians. We want to ensure that we continue this track and ensure safety not just for our drivers but of course for pedestrians, cyclists, children and families.

On the subject of cyclists in particular, I want to say that in my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore cycling is not just a recreational pastime; there are many people who in fact commute as cyclists, whether they're riding their bicycle to a GO train station—to what will be much more frequent service shortly—or to a subway station, to school, to work, to places of worship, to shop, or, increasingly, even to other parts of the city. Whether it's on Lakeshore Boulevard West or Burnhamthorpe, The West Mall or Prince Edward Drive in my riding, people want to know that they'll be able to ride their bicycle safely and get to where they're heading in one piece.

This bill introduces very important amendments that address the safety of cyclists, including key recommendations from the #CycleON Action Plan that was released in April of last year.

As I said during second reading debate on this legislation, cyclists in my riding will be happy to know that Bill 31 addresses key issues such as contraflow bike lanes, bicycle-specific traffic signals and riding on paved shoulders, all of which will contribute to a much safer cycling environment.

I also wish to speak to how Bill 31 addresses other road safety issues that continue to be persistent challenges in Ontario, including the very serious issue of impaired driving. Especially with our young people, this is one of the most challenging issues that we face.

I was very pleased to have attended an event in my riding last week with Humber College students. Of course, their school year is winding down. They are getting ready for their summer jobs and the various things they're going to be doing over the summer. Nonetheless, they got together to put on an amazing event to talk about the safe consumption of alcohol generally, but certainly as it relates to drinking and driving and the need to drink responsibly.

Students all across Ontario are engaged in these efforts to ensure that our roads are safer and to be responsible. This legislation targets not only the issue of drinking and driving, but also, importantly, the issue of other forms of impairment—most notably, impairment by drugs as it relates to driving—and puts in place a framework to put in mechanisms to control that much better.

Unfortunately, in 2011, drinking and driving fatalities represented nearly one quarter of all fatalities that year on the roads of Ontario. But over 45% of drivers killed in Ontario were found to have drugs or a combination of drugs and alcohol in their system.

While there are sanctions that allow police to remove drivers from the road when they are reasonably believed to be impaired by alcohol, there's no way under existing provincial sanctions for police to remove drivers from the road when they are reasonably believed to be impaired by drugs. That's why we need to pass this bill, Mr. Speaker. We need to support those students at Humber College

and other institutions across this province and their parents by ensuring that the measures in this bill become law, to make sure that we have the tools in place to ensure that people who are impaired aren't allowed to continue to drive.

If passed, the amendments to the Highway Traffic Act will be a first step in addressing impaired driving caused by drugs and will extend the alcohol-impaired driving sanctions to drug-impaired drivers, and that's a very important step.

I look forward to hearing more from my colleagues on this this afternoon. I know the member from Etobicoke Centre has more remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's an honour to speak to this bill. Before I get into the bill itself, I just wanted to share some quick thoughts about how important this bill is and the issues that we're debating here today.

Many years ago, my grandfather used to pick me up from school almost every day. He had one of the largest automobiles I think I'd ever seen. It was one of those old automobiles, the long ones, steel and sturdy.

One day, we were driving home and it was rainy. My grandfather lost control of the vehicle and we spun into oncoming traffic. I was sitting in the back seat; both of us were fine. But I remember one of the doctors in the hospital or a nurse or someone like that coming to see me and saying to me, "You know, if you weren't sitting in the back, you'd be in deep trouble." For whatever reason, the way the car was hit, the way that car was built, the safety precautions that were in place at the time weren't what we have today. I was fortunate, and my grandfather was fortunate. He was injured—

Interjection.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Exactly—but survived and lived a long life after that, which is great.

What that highlighted for me is a couple of things. One is the importance of road safety, of making sure that we're doing all the things we need to do to make sure people can get to school, to work and home every single day. We take that for granted. Some of us have had these awful experiences, or know others who have had these awful experiences, some of them unfortunately tragic.

1430

So the work never ends. We can always make our roads safer, and that's what this bill is about. We have a strong track record on this issue. If we think about the accident I had—that would have been 30 years or so ago—I think the progress that has been made in road safety, not just in how we build cars, but also in the actions our government has taken on road safety, have really been strong and effective in contributing to the safety we enjoy today.

Over the weekend, I was listening to a presentation by a doctor. He works as a trauma surgeon at the McGill health centre. He was talking about how the number of people who die—the mortality rates from trauma, at least

in Canada, have declined dramatically over the past 15 to 20 years. I think a lot of this has to do with what we're doing on road safety. So I think there is a lot of good work that has been done. As I think was mentioned by some of my colleagues, we have some of the safest roads in the world—certainly in North America—but the battle, the work, isn't over. There's more work to be done. That's why this bill is so important. We have to adapt to the world around us and make sure we're doing better to ensure people's safety.

I'm proud to stand in support of this bill. It's part of a broad package, and it's going to help us achieve our objectives of making sure we improve road safety. The issue of enhancing the collection of defaulted Provincial Offences Act fines was mentioned by my colleague from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, and strengthening or improving the Highway 407 East Act and addressing a number of outstanding housekeeping proposals.

When I talked about how there's more work to be done, that's because we have more challenges. According to recent data, over 45% of drivers killed in Ontario were found to have drugs, or a combination of drugs or alcohol, in their system. Drinking and driving fatalities represented nearly one quarter of all fatalities in 2011. So notwithstanding what that doctor from McGill was telling me, there's a lot of work to be done, because there are many people who are, unfortunately, losing their lives to traffic fatalities.

From 2008 to 2012, an average of 14% of convicted alcohol-impaired drivers were repeat offenders. So it's happening, and then it's happening again. If current collision trends continue, fatalities from distracted driving may exceed those from drinking and driving by 2016. This is a good example of how we need to adapt to the world around us.

Driving under the influence has been a problem, and it's still a challenge for us. But we see increasing accident rates as a result of folks who are distracted behind the wheel. I think that most of us know primarily why that's happening, and this bill aims to address that. In 2011, pedestrians constituted approximately one in five motor-vehicle-related fatalities, so there's certainly a lot of work to be done.

I talked about distracted driving. What this bill does is increase penalties for distracted driving. It increases the legislative fine range from \$60 to \$500 as a penalty upon conviction for distracted drivers, to \$300 to \$1,000, so basically increasing the fines. At the top end, we're doubling it, and adding three demerit points for distracted driving through regulation and adding a distracted driving prohibition to the existing novice driver's licence conditions under the graduated licensing system through regulation.

Basically what that means, for the folks at home, is that we're helping people to form the right habits early on. When you're part of the graduated licensing system, you're learning to drive. You're forming habits that are going to persist for the rest of your life, and it is important that those habits be the right ones.

Impaired driving: We're going to increase alcohol-impaired driver education and treatment by expanding the requirements to complete remedial measures and the ignition interlock program for repeatedly driving with a blood-alcohol concentration exceeding—basically a high blood-alcohol concentration level—and extending the current Reduced Suspension with Ignition Interlock Conduct Review Program to repeat offenders, again going after repeat offenders, people who consistently commit and put people at risk on the roads, and expanding alcohol-impaired driving countermeasures to intervene against drug-impaired driving.

I could go on for quite a while, but I think what this bill does is a range of things. It imposes stiffer penalties and fines. What this will allow us to do is tackle some of those issues I talked about: impaired driving, distracted driving and people driving under the influence of drugs.

This is really about making sure that we're tackling what I talked about at the beginning. It's about adapting to the world around us and making sure that we're constantly working hard to make Ontario's roads the safest in the world, but also making sure that we take an issue that is so important to so many people and make sure that every single one of us can continue to have faith that when we get in the automobile or on a bike, or when we walk across the street, we can be safe in our province and our communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to share my time with my colleague from Scarborough Southwest, who is sitting at the other end of the chamber, and give him an opportunity to speak to this bill also.

I'm pleased to speak to this bill—I have a personal interest—and I will outline why. This is the second introduction of this bill by the Minister of Transportation, and it's a bill to improve road safety in Ontario.

It's a key piece of legislation being brought forward by this government. It has arrived here after many, many years of work by the Ministry of Transportation, and I can vouch for that, because I got involved with a couple of the staff there with regard to an issue in my own riding.

Hopefully, this bill brings much improvement to the Highway Traffic Act in terms of improving road safety. It's also going to enhance collections under the Provincial Offences Act, which municipalities have been asking for for years. AMO, year after year—when I was an AMO board member, I remember addressing this issue.

I think the minister has made some good amendments to the act here, because it's responding to some of the concerns that have been raised out there in the general community.

The most important one for me is distracted driving, because that was the issue that I raised here in 2013 as a result of an accident in my riding where a family lost a loved one, and we now have children without a mom, a husband without a wife, and we have many relatives left without a loved one in their family.

It was really sad, how this accident took place, and I would repeat it to the members of the chamber.

The person had just left the temple in my riding after practising her faith and doing her morning prayer, and walked to the bus stop to catch the next bus to go to work at midday, and was just innocently standing at the bus stop, next to the bus shelter, waiting for the bus to arrive.

As the bus arrived, as it came in to the spot, she started to walk towards the bus. At the same time, a vehicle making a left turn obviously was moving at a speed too high. The driver just realized, "I'm at the intersection and I need to turn left," and swerved and made contact with the bus and squeezed this person between the bus and the bus shelter and the vehicle. She was pronounced dead at the scene.

Unfortunately, the driver of the vehicle that made the left turn was observed by many passers-by and folks on the sidewalk to be on the phone, and they did give evidence to the police. I'm not sure what happened in the courts yet, because I haven't followed the case, but I'm sure that there was enough evidence there that the family will get justice in the court system.

But that's not what the family wanted. The family lost someone, and they wanted that person not to be forgotten a year later or two years later, or whatever. They approached me: What could I do, as the representative of the area, to make a change with regard to distracted driving and people who are on their cellphones while they're driving, either talking or texting?

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It's a real shame that this happens in our society, because you can buy a device for \$100 or \$25 that will allow you to use your phone if it's necessary, in an emergency or whatever, and not have to be on the phone so that you are distracted. But yet still, people are doing it. They're doing it even today, after the government has had media reports that we're bringing in this piece of legislation. I drive the Don Valley Parkway every day, morning and afternoon Monday to Thursday, and I can tell you that I witness two or three people on the phone, texting or talking, every morning as I come in and every evening as I go home. To me, we have to change the behaviour. We can't do it by outreach—it's not working—so we have to do it through legislation.

In my research when I was approached by the family, I was astounded to find out that the fines for distracted driving, or talking on the phone while you're driving, were as low as \$60, up to \$500. The chief justice in the court had set a limit—I believe it was \$260 at a time. To most people, especially salespeople or people on the run, that's the price of doing business—"I can pay the ticket"—but it's when you have a fatality that it becomes very important, that we need to do something.

That triggered me. I went back to the family and I said, "Look, here's the problem: The fines are too low. I can bring in a private member's bill or I can approach the Minister of Transportation." But then I went beyond that. I started to do some research on drinking and driving and realized that drinking and driving started out as a very

small fine and worked its way up. It included demerit points, it included impoundment of a vehicle etc. I thought, "This is the model I want to copy." But when I went to the Ministry of Transportation staff, I couldn't do it, because the minister is the only one with the power to do it in regulation. I decided, "No, I want to do something for the family in my riding," so I crafted a bill that actually took legislation and regulation and put it in one, so I could raise awareness for the Minister of Transportation, raise awareness in this House and actually put some pressure on somebody to move.

I have to say, I am pleased today to know that the previous Minister of Transportation did accept my request and brought forward legislation, which is the package that we have in front of us today. But unfortunately, as a result of an election, we sort of lost that momentum and it's here again. I would urge everyone to do whatever they can to pass this piece of legislation quickly, so that we can get out there and enforce it by the local police forces as soon as possible, because our community is not changing, behaviour is not changing, and I think that what we need to do is to affect people's daily lives by either affecting their pocketbook or taking away their vehicle etc. Then the behaviours will change.

With that, I'm happy this bill is here. This is third reading. I hope we don't debate it forever and ever. Maybe after the main speeches from all three parties, and probably one round of other debates, we could let it go forward, because if you really look at this bill and you listened to everybody speaking during second reading, we all support it. So let's get it done, and get it done because it's the right thing to do and it's long overdue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I want to thank all the previous speakers. It seemed that everyone else spoke about different parts of the bill, which doesn't leave much for me, but I'm going to mention some things that I think are important in this bill. As has been mentioned, the short name for the bill is Making Ontario's Roads Safer. That involves not only the vehicles—the motor vehicles that are being driven, or the cyclists, or the people who are on motorcycles or other motorized devices—but it also includes pedestrians and rules to try to protect pedestrians from getting hit.

There are always people who get hit—especially in my riding of Scarborough Southwest and other parts of Scarborough—who were just trying to cross the road, and the problem is that sometimes you cannot see the person crossing the road. It may be late, after the sun goes down, and I'll notice someone. I'll say, "Is that person crossing the road?" and I'll just slow down.

I've been with my dad in my car a lot recently. He's not driving right now because of his age. He'll say to me, "How come you're slowing down?" I'll say to him, "There's a person ahead of us." "Where?" I'll just say, "I'm slowing down."

We've got various improvements that have been made for driving and for bicycling and for other safety meas-

ures to make sure that when roads are used, people don't get killed or seriously injured.

One other point I just wanted to mention before I get into some details is that all of us know someone who has either been hit seriously or even killed by a motor vehicle. I have a relative who was killed. He was on a motorcycle. Someone went through a red light and struck someone that I know, and he died at 39 years old. People on bicycles are getting run over. Pedestrians, as I said earlier, are getting run over. So the nature of things that are being done on the roads has changed a lot. I guess I would sum it up that the nature of driving and moving on roads has changed a lot in the last 20 years, or even in the past 10 years.

As my previous colleagues mentioned, the introduction of cellular phones is a major distraction, and it accounts for a lot of accidents. All of us have been in a car. I can see when I'm in a car sometimes that a driver is still on the phone. I think those fines should be increased. I know we've passed legislation that makes it illegal to drive with a device either attached to you or for texting or for whatever else, but people still want to do it. The only way to do it is to increase the fines and to increase the penalties for people who do that.

I want to speak a little bit about one thing that we have in the bill, and that's the ignition interlock program. Basically it's a device installed at the front part of the car. The driver has to blow into the device that's attached to the car. It's kind of like a breathalyzer test in the car, and it will decide whether or not you can drive. If it reads a blood alcohol level above the permitted amount, the car will not start. We are providing some incentives for people who put this in their car and are convicted. If they are suspended, we can reduce the suspension time if they comply and co-operate and use this device in their car. I think that's one thing that is very important. It's called the ignition interlock program.

I also want to touch a bit on bicyclists and the nature of bicycling these days. Especially in Toronto, and outside of Toronto too, there are a lot of people on bicycles. A lot of people want to take their bicycle to work and back home, all kinds of people in all different kinds of professions. I think we need to create more rules to make sure that they don't get hit, but also rules to make sure that they ride properly in the bicycle lanes as well.

I just want to mention a few things here. Basically, it's called a one-metre passing rule. A motor vehicle cannot pass a bicyclist unless there's one metre between the bicyclist and the car. I think that's a good thing. Some drivers want to rush around and they complain about the bicyclists, but bicyclists have a right to be on the road. I think this is a good thing, and it's supported by bicycle groups. There are various things in the bill that provide help to bicyclists and a number of things that we've consulted with various bicycle groups and other stakeholders on to make sure that they drive better and that the motor vehicles are more aware of the bicycles.

One little thing that is now allowed is that bicyclists can carry flashing red lights either at the front of the bike

or at the back of the bike, or both. Sometimes at night it's hard to see the bicyclists, but if you have the flashing red light either at the front or the back of the bicycle, it's much easier to see the bicycle.

Interjection.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I won't get into that too much, about other cycling changes, but we've talked and worked with cycling groups and they're pleased with the changes that we've made.

I also want to mention that in the province of Ontario, for the last 13 years, we've either been ranked first or second in North America for road safety. Our government is proud of our record of having amongst the safest roads in North America.

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But again, as people have spoken today, we know there are ways that we can do more to improve road safety programs. This bill, Bill 31, not only serves to protect drivers; it also has a number of provisions to help pedestrians as well—and I've mentioned bicyclists—on roads. From 2008 to 2012, an average of 14% of convicted alcohol-impaired drivers were repeat offenders. In the numbers of the actual percentage of people that got hit, 45% of drivers killed in Ontario were found to have a combination of drugs and alcohol in their system.

It's easy to have the alcohol levels measured, but I think we need to start to have a conversation about people who are on illegal drugs or even on legal drugs who are impaired and shouldn't be getting in a motor vehicle. This is something that we need to talk about some more. There are a lot of issues around the whole thing of having drivers have to stop and get—not only a breathalyzer, but some measurement of the amount of drugs in their body, whether it be to provide a urine sample or even a blood sample. But that, again, has to be fleshed out and has to be discussed some more at some future date, because it is something that can be seen as intrusive to a person's privacy.

My time is limited here. I was just going to wrap up by saying that the bill is good. It's good for bicyclists; it's good for drivers; it's good for everybody else involved. As I said, it's more dangerous now to drive and to walk along streets and to ride motorcycles or other motorized vehicles than ever before. This bill is keeping up with and is actually above what other jurisdictions are doing when it comes to road safety. I think, being on third reading, as my colleague earlier mentioned, we've had a lot of discussion on this. Hopefully, we can have the debate over and make it into law, which would be a good thing, as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a chance to comment on the Bill 31 debate, the leadoff of the government: the Minister of Education and the members from Cambridge, Northumberland—Quinte West, Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Etobicoke Centre, Scarborough—Rouge River, Scarborough Centre and Scarborough Southwest. It seems like the government now has a 10-minute limit

on how long their members can speak, so they're all speaking to bills and are talking about various aspects of Bill 31.

Certainly we have some questions on this side of the House to do with the details, because a lot of the details are not in the bill itself. I'm learning from the member from Perth—Wellington about what school buses might be used for after they're done serving schools. Of course, this bill deals with the fact that, after they've been used, they can't stay chrome yellow. So I was chatting with him, asking about it. Apparently, they get used for inter-barn pig transfers down in his part of the world. The painting of them isn't a big deal. They actually just rent a sprayer. It may not be the most beautiful paint job, but they get painted. That is one of the uses that school buses are used for in his area after they're done.

I'm really pleased to see that "slow down, move over" for tow trucks and other emergency vehicles is in this particular bill. That was something put forward by the member from Simcoe North. There are a lot of tow truck drivers and other emergency workers who are killed on the side of highways. I think that that will make a difference as people realize that they need to move over, as we now do for police cars. I think that will make a difference in making our tow truck and other emergency workers safer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a pleasure and a privilege to stand here on behalf of the good people in Algoma—Manitoulin.

Bill 31: It's a combination of a couple of prior bills—a lot of good suggestions that have gone into it from my friends here to my right and also from colleagues we have within our caucus and also the government.

It's nice to see ideas coming together under one bill. The unfortunate part is that it takes so darned long to get it done. When I was part of the committee working on this particular bill, there were, again, some really good, positive discussions that were held at committee, quite a few amendments that were made there. I will allude to those amendments when I have my opportunity to speak to this later today.

There was a lot of good, constructive discussion and points that were brought by both opposition parties, who went out and consulted with their stakeholders. We all heard some of those individuals who came to us in committee and brought their suggestions as to how they felt about this particular bill in regard to how we could actually improve it: where we could go to make it safer for pedestrians, to make it safer for the tow truck drivers who are on the side of the road; to make it safer in identifying those who are caught up in distracted driving, and to make sure that fines are at a proper level, so that individuals could start reacting and start acting upon the bad choices they're making. But, unfortunately, none of those amendments were accepted.

The bill is what it is. We will work with this government, moving forward on it. But again, I look forward to some of the comments I want to make in my follow-up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak in support of Bill 31 this afternoon. It is not the first time I have spoken in support of this bill.

As the member from Algoma-Manitoulin remembers, this bill has been before the House before, unfortunately, and it went as far as committee. We had second reading, and it went through to committee. Unfortunately, things were interrupted by an election that we did not expect. But here we are again. We are presenting this bill because it's important. We're thinking of the road safety of Ontarians.

I want to just point out that my notes say that if current collision trends continue, fatalities just from distracted driving, which is part of this bill, may exceed those from drinking and driving by next year—by 2016. That tells us how important this bill is. It's important that it move forward; it's important that we debate it, that we improve it, that we send it to committee and that we make it into law as soon as possible. It would make a difference for a lot of people's lives.

Distracted driving is probably one of the most common issues we see on the road every day when we're driving. This bill would increase the penalties for distracted driving by increasing the existing legislated fine range of \$60 to \$500 as a penalty upon conviction, and it would add three demerit points. I think this would make a difference in convincing a lot of people to stop the texting in the car that happens today.

This bill actually incorporates the spirit of four different PMBs. A lot of members have come together to form this bill, and we should turn it into law as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, I'm going to narrow my comments down to two speakers that I listened to this afternoon. I remember, a couple of months ago, that I went across the floor and spoke to the member from Cambridge, who I believe is the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation. I guess my issue was—and I can show you, Speaker; I drew all kinds of trucks in different combinations of what they look like, because I do have some experience that way. I asked the member why they were just focusing on B-trains, which is one type of a combination of trains—and trains are two trailers hooked together, for your information, Speaker. I was assured the explanation would come back to me as to why they were just focusing on B-trains. That never happened, so I don't know why the government is doing this.

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I see the OTA thinks this is a good idea, but I would guess that when I ask a question of the government in the House and those members of the government who have taken on the responsibility of being with the ministry, that these answers could come back to me. Then again, I remember the previous Minister of Transportation, who's

the environment minister now, never did answer any of my letters. I guess this is something that goes on with the government over there.

I would also like to address the comments by the member from Scarborough-Rouge River. I believe him when he says that they did take a lot of advice from people who supposedly know these things. One of them was AMO. AMO has been pushing for a lot of these changes throughout the years. I wish he would talk to the Attorney General and get her to listen to AMO when it comes to joint and several liability. That would be really nice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the members from the government side has the opportunity to respond.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I want to thank my colleagues this afternoon. I know the comment has been made that we're all taking turns here, but, to be fair to my side, there are many members who really want to speak to this important bill on road safety.

I want to thank my colleagues the Minister of Education, the members from Northumberland-Quinte West, Etobicoke Centre, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Scarborough-Rouge River, and Scarborough Southwest, and also my colleagues across the way, the members from Parry Sound-Muskoka, Algoma-Manitoulin and Perth-Wellington—and my colleague here from York South-Weston—for their comments.

I just wanted to say that this is a government that is really trying to get ahead of our safety issues that we still identify that are issues here in Ontario, with distracted drivers and drug-impaired drivers. It's a pretty sweeping bill with a lot of great things in it to protect our cyclists and passengers. We're really cognizant that many of our road safety partners, our municipalities, our police and our insurance industries all wish to see the speedy passage of Bill 31.

We also know that if we delay much further in getting this bill passed, lives can still be lost. We heard earlier that every 18 hours another person is killed on our roads. The sooner that this bill is passed, the sooner the legislation can come into effect in protecting our people, ensuring that our new legislation will protect cyclists from dooring with the one-metre safe-passing law, and protection from distracted drivers—all those things will ensure that we can reduce the fatalities on Ontario's roads and ensure that our municipalities can get their POA fines paid.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: It's a great pleasure to be back up speaking to Bill 31 today. I'll just inform those here that I will have an hour on behalf of the official opposition as PC transportation critic. So settle in, get a top-up of your water—for those at home, make yourself comfortable—because, once again, I have the opportunity to address Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act, a bill that, while we in the official opposition support it in large part, could have done so much more to

actually make Ontario roads safer if only the government members hadn't followed their marching orders to choose partisanship over partnership in refusing to endorse any one of our 30-plus opposition amendments.

I know the general public and many of you here today didn't get the opportunity, like I did, to participate in committee, an important function of the Legislature where members of all parties go through the bill, clause by clause, putting forward novel ideas or suggested changes from stakeholders' groups. We would hear a lot about our road safety partners; many of them put forward exceptional ideas. I'll go through talking about that process. In fact, we had put forward 30 of them in addition to the ones that were included into the bill from previous sessions—like my colleague from Simcoe-Grey and my colleague for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

We felt it would have given much more strength to the bill had the government's members not voted out, in fact, one of their own sections of the bill to address impaired driving penalties, among other things. But I'll get to that later, of course.

Before going further down that road, I do want to state clearly that we in the official opposition share the government goals of making Ontario roads safer as well as many of the principles that drive Bill 31 when it comes to meeting those goals. I do feel it is our responsibility, as provincially elected representatives, to work towards safer roads for all, and I welcome the opportunity government has provided, in bringing Bill 31 forward, to discuss these important concepts.

That said, I would submit that it is also our responsibility to consider other approaches and opposing views, and work with elected representatives on all sides of this House to get this right, now.

Speaker, it was only nine months ago that Premier Wynne told us this government was going to be different—July 4, 2014. As a matter of fact, she told us that “our government must ... engage all Ontarians as full partners in solving the challenges we face as individuals, as communities, as businesses and as a province.”

She went on to contend that her government would “put evidence before ideology and choose partnership over partisanship, and invite everyone to work together, with and through government, to overcome our challenges and to thrive as a result.” That's what she said.

As laudable as these goals were, and as eager as we in opposition were to see what this new, engaging, co-operative government would look like, I can tell you, after three days of committee, that it doesn't look a whole lot different than the arrogant, unaccountable, uncooperative government regime that has refused opposition input for more than a decade. And look at where that has got us today, Speaker: ballooning deficits, dwindling job prospects, labour strife and a whole lot of finger-pointing.

There is no willingness to put evidence before ideology. There is no choosing of partnership over partisanship. There is no invitation to work together. Over three days of committee on Bill 31, we saw none of any of that.

In fact, read the Hansard. I encourage anyone who wants to see the true nature of this government to check out the general government committee Hansard for March 23 and March 25 and, of course, March 30. Go through the debate: the strong amendments put forth by opposition to enhance Bill 31's goal to make Ontario's roads safer, each one with sound arguments, spelled out succinctly by members looking for that partnership Ms. Wynne had promised us so few months ago. I can tell you, Speaker, you can look for that partnership all you want. Go through every argument, every amendment. You're not going to find it, because it's not there.

It gives me no pleasure to report that over three days of Bill 31 clause-by-clause general government committee meetings, where members were to consider possible upgrades to strengthen the bill, not just rubber-stamp it, out of more than 30 amendments brought forth by the opposition parties, including those of the third party—I know the critic for the third party is here today, and I look forward to his remarks later on—not a single, solitary one was given support by the Liberal majority to allow the bill to be amended.

It just boggles my mind. We had very strong amendments here, covering a wide range of aspects, to actually strengthen Bill 31. If I have the time, I will obviously go into each one of them. I do think it's important for those here today, and those watching at home, to know exactly what those were.

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From improving the medical review of drivers' licences—something a lot of our constituency offices hear about, day in and day out—to left-lane hogs, to window tinting and roundabout rules, of course, among many others, not one of them saw the light of day—not one. What part of “partnership” don't they understand, Speaker? Partisanship, however, based on the results from the Bill 31 committee deliberations, seems to be well understood—very obvious. It's alive and well here in Wynne Ontario.

Just look at our attempt to call for the establishment of an advisory committee to analyze highway incident management and to develop a comprehensive program for the improvement of highway incident management, something I heard police call for. And it was part of the private member's bill of the member from Thornhill, Mrs. Gila Martow, Bill 30, the Highway Incident Management Act. This was a very important amendment, as it would have ensured that all highway incident management protocols are up to date. Something that we need to continue to do is modernize things, based on sound evidence and approved by, of course, experts in the field. The amendment would have also ensured that our highway incident management protocols are developed with input from all public stakeholders, including the public.

Despite the wide-ranging support for this important idea to make Ontario's roads safer, I was not even granted the time to actually discuss the initiative. While the amendment was initially ruled out of order, I got my

first taste of partisanship over partnership when government members refused to grant unanimous consent to debate the concept. The difficult part of it was that I would have liked to have seen members at least consider the arguments and their impacts on road safety. I think the onus is on the committee to at least discuss those amendments or motions. By just saying no, it immediately shuts down any potential discussion on an issue. Here, we had proposed thoughtful amendments to increase road safety in Ontario. I would have thought it to be incumbent on our committee to have a discussion, at the very least.

That was just the start of it, Speaker—the tip of the iceberg, as they say—with a lot more to follow. Shortly after being muzzled with regard to highway incident management, I faced new hurdles in attempting to enhance safety with an amendment to allow school bus drivers to use two-way radios, exempting them from some of the parameters of Bill 31. As I explained at committee, our motion would have exempted drivers of school buses from section 23 of the bill. The rationale here is really that two-way radios in school buses are an important tool used for vehicle safety issues or student safety issues.

Student safety could be enhanced by allowing, for example, a driver to call base, to have a dispatcher call a student's home and ensure a parent or guardian is home to receive a child when there is no sign of anyone at home. It just makes sense, right? Most operators, in fact, have definitive radio policies so that the radio does not become, of course, a social network but is used for the exact purpose it was designed for. When an emergency arises, the driver calls dispatch, then hangs up the microphone and awaits the response from the dispatcher. Bus drivers require this tool to be able to better ensure the safety of their passengers. Of course, all of them are loved ones.

This was something that the school bus association had put forward as an amendment, to ask us to add some clarity. That's what this is about. It's about bringing clarity. Yet once again, Speaker, today, just as it was two weeks ago at committee, Bill 31 fails to bring that clarity as Wynne Liberal members followed their marching orders and refused us the partnership over partisanship that the people of Ontario were misled to believe would be a hallmark of the Wynne government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I believe the member made a comment that was unparliamentary, and I'll have to ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'll withdraw that, Speaker.

It is unfortunate, because together we could have accomplished so much more. One of the things we could have accomplished was, finally, after a year of this government talking, we could have brought in demerit points to accompany fines for distracted driving. As we heard during second reading debate, Bill 31 does provide significant enhanced penalties for distracted driving. Just to be clear, when we are talking about distracted drivers, we are, and the bill is, talking about drivers who talk,

text, type, dial or email using hand-held cellphones and other hand-held devices while operating their vehicle. The law also prohibits drivers from viewing display screens unrelated to the driving task, such as laptops or DVD players—pretty basic stuff. If you have to grab it to read it, you can't and you shouldn't do it.

I think we can all understand the reasons behind that. We've all seen the impacts of those who have chosen to ignore hand-held restrictions. I don't know about you, Speaker, but I had the opportunity to watch some of the graphic commercials that were put out. We all remember the significant public education programs that Mothers Against Drunk Driving put out on impaired driving back in the day. There have been some extremely hard-hitting YouTube videos of teens in a car driving while texting; you see those awful accidents occur. That is the reality here.

Of course, another really important road safety partner, the CAA, has indicated that driver distraction is a factor in about four million motor vehicle crashes in North America each year, and that 20% to 30% of all collisions internationally involve some sort of driver distraction. In Ontario specifically, the OPP have indicated that distracted driving is a causal factor in 30% to 50% of traffic collisions here in the province.

As Bill 31 proposes fine increases up to \$1,000, we remain in full support of that increase, but more importantly, we want to ensure that this is part of a bigger picture which includes demerit points on driving licences. While fines provide a significant one-time deterrent, demerits are like a monthly reminder, when making that increased insurance payment, of why distracted driving just simply doesn't pay.

The surprising fact is that Ontario is one of only three provinces and territories that have absolutely no demerit penalty for distracted driving violations. It's a bit of a head-scratcher, perhaps, considering how often transportation ministers talk about it.

In fact, I saw news reports both this year and last, as well as in our ministerial briefing on this bill, that the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act would actually be imposing a three-demerit-point penalty for convicted motorists. Unfortunately, just as my colleague from Elgin-Middlesex-London found in the previous version of this legislation, Bill 173, there's absolutely no mention of demerit points in the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act—no demerits, no mention in the legislation, and still a lot of misleading information in media and on ministerial backgrounders indicating that the legislation would, in fact, include demerits.

What's even more concerning is that the minister doesn't even require legislation to implement demerits. He can do it any time he wants through regulation. Again, here we have a minister who says he wants to take on distracted driving, and yet this same minister has waited months to take the simplest first regulatory step to positively impact people's driving habits. Seriously, how many accidents could have been prevented while we spin our wheels reading headlines of demerit penalties that just simply are not there?

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It's for these reasons that we brought forth an amendment to end the waiting game, for the minister to act and get on with it by including legislated demerits as part of the bill itself. The motion would have ensured that three demerit points would be given to anyone convicted of distracted driving. We have waited for over a year for regulations to be enacted on demerit points, and it hasn't happened.

The best way to ensure that demerit points are applied is to put it into the legislation, make it the law, so that we absolutely know that it's going to happen. Yet, despite the logic presented here, and despite the government members agreeing that demerits are in fact an important part of the solution, I regret to report that partisanship again won the day, when it came to the vote, over partnership.

The government members talked in circles about the need for demerits. Eventually they went to great lengths to highlight the government's commitment to demerits some time after the bill receives royal assent—just as we've heard for over a year now. So we continue to wait, and we'll continue to wait after third reading for promised distracted driving demerits that have become more fantasy than reality.

Looking for other areas to strengthen the bill and sniff out that elusive partnership that Premier Wynne promised we would be shown, perhaps we would have a breakthrough on the need to make our roads safer through addressing the shared responsibility of all road users by instituting penalties for texting and cycling. I wouldn't hold your breath.

Current wording does not allow the Highway Traffic Act to be applied to those riding bicycles, yet, as we all know, bicycles are road vehicles and the same laws that apply to drivers of motor vehicles, in many cases, should apply to bicyclists. This is, of course, something that was brought forward by the Ottawa police, and I'll get into that in a few minutes.

We feel that there must be at least some acknowledgement of the shared responsibility that all vehicle operators, including cyclists, have when it comes to maintaining our road safety. I think we can all agree that the tragedies that can ensue from distracted cycling need to be addressed in law. Penalties and—with our amendment, we have suggested—fines must be in place to discourage this behaviour and recognize shared responsibility and safety.

The Ottawa Police Service provided a submission on this front on March 9. Sergeant Mark Gatien of the Ottawa Police Service noted that, "With this small change, it would encompass bicycles and implements of husbandry (mainly backhoes and front-end loaders). Our hands are presently tied with cellphone infractions being committed on bicycles and backhoes etc. using our roadways. There have been countless complaints to the police via social media about the use of phones with these methods of transportation, and with the present wordings our hands are tied for enforcement efforts."

Again, this is a suggestion from law enforcement themselves—in fact, out of our nation's capital, Ottawa, because there is a significant problem with cyclists using their cellphones or devices when riding a bicycle. That's dangerous to them and others, including motorists and pedestrians, yet again, I regret to report that despite the obvious benefits of making Ontario roads safer for all, partnership to get this amendment through was not on the menu for government members, who once again chose to vote against every opposition attempt to amend and improve the bill.

Again, I want to take the opportunity to clearly state that we in the official opposition share the government's goals of making Ontario roads safer. We support many of the initiatives contained in Bill 31 when it comes to meeting those goals. We all know that Ontario roadways could be safer. It is our responsibility as legislators to work towards safer roads for all, but I contend that it is also our responsibility to listen to opposing views—in fact, it's written on these walls, right in this very chamber—to consider their pluses and minuses, and to partner with elected representatives of all stripes, instead of voting according to invisible partisan lines, to ensure that, in the end, we get this right. That is an objective I think we could all unite around.

It is again to that end that we aspired in calling for section 100.2 of the act, as set out in section 33 of the bill, to be amended by adding the establishment of a vehicle inspection standards advisory committee to advise the director of vehicle inspection standards. You see, we would prefer that the government did not create a director of vehicle inspection standards at all, given the government's record on automobile standards programs—of course, Drive Clean comes to mind.

Currently, there is very little information about the regulations that will be put into place by the director of vehicle inspection standards. We want to make sure that the regulatory framework for determining whether or not a car is roadworthy is developed with broad consultation that includes experts and the general public. That sounds fair.

We do understand that 40% of recommended light vehicle maintenance repair is postponed, but would rather see government incentivizing customers to encourage vehicle inspection as opposed to enforcing a mandatory and costly inspection regime. That said, if this new regime is being considered by government, we on this side of the House want to ensure that there's accountability and of course transparency, which has, in fact, been absent from the aforementioned vehicle emissions standards program. That is why we crafted a motion to require that "The director of vehicle inspection standards shall, within 90 days of the end of a calendar year, submit to the minister an annual report on the administration of the program." That's what we asked for.

Oversight is important for the success of any government program. History has shown that the lack of oversight leads to corruption and scandal. This motion would ensure that there is at least some oversight over

the vehicle inspection program, and give the Legislature some sense of the effectiveness of the program. I don't think it is too hard to ask for an annual report. It gives the opportunity to the members of the Legislative Assembly to provide proper oversight, at least annually, through the submission of an annual report.

Unfortunately, while that oversight was the key to our vehicle inspections amendments, none were allowed to move forward, as the Wynne government members voted us down once again. Where is the partnership? We're still looking.

Perhaps it would come with the discussion surrounding our amendment to enshrine roundabout rules in law—a direction government members had already endorsed with the approval of, in fact, my private member's bill, the Safe Roundabouts Act. I felt that, with the support of all three parties, we could have proceeded with the intent of the House during second reading, and moved forward on needed roundabout rules.

As I reported to committee members, over the last two years, I have made numerous attempts to bring this government's attention to the fact that, with more than 40 roundabouts across the Waterloo region in my area and more being constructed in communities across this province, many in your own communities here today, it's our responsibility as legislators to move forward on enhancing roundabout safety throughout the entire province.

To be clear, I am fully supportive of roundabouts. Again, with the 40 in my area in the region of Waterloo, I have come to understand many well-established operational benefits that they can provide to traffic flow, speed and the severity of a collision. That said, I have also come to understand that while roundabouts have their advantages—whether it is in my region of Waterloo, in Hamilton, Ottawa or Windsor—concerns over consistency of rules for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists continue to grow as roundabout construction increases.

Quite simply, the Highway Traffic Act currently fails to address roundabouts whatsoever—no rules. My amendments sought to remedy that omission by both (1) defining roundabouts and (2) giving the Minister of Transportation the ability to establish clear, uniform rules across the entire province. Further, these amendments would have required the minister to consult with the public about the safe use of roundabouts and then table a progress report every year until a regulation to address the safe use of roundabouts is made. Pretty easy; pretty simple.

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This consultation requirement would have addressed a series of factors, including: the use of crosswalks; signs and markings; lighting; how commercial vehicles navigate through a roundabout; the speed limits; signalling; entering and exiting roundabouts; uniformity of road design standards, including consistency in lane width; and compliance, of course, with the accessibility standards, something extremely important. This would not only raise awareness on how to maneuver through a roundabout but increase pedestrian, cyclist and motorist

safety, helping to reduce accidents across the entire province.

Then my amendments would have required that, following consultation, the minister would in fact make regulations establishing rules of the road that apply to roundabouts. You see, currently without the guidance of one provincial law for all, the road is open for different areas to establish varying directions, leaving both drivers and pedestrians unsure as to how they're expected to navigate a roundabout. A motorist who follows the local rules, say, in Waterloo region may not necessarily be heeding the protocols of other areas. I'll give you an example, Speaker. Right now, we have a situation in the region of Waterloo where the Ministry of Transportation tells drivers to slow down and watch for pedestrians, whereas the region says that pedestrians go first and that when entering or exiting a roundabout, drivers should yield the crosswalk to pedestrians. It's the same for signalling. While both the region and the province agree that drivers should signal right when exiting a roundabout, the region directs drivers planning a left turn driving all or most of the way around the circle to signal left, while the province is mute on left-hand signalling.

As I told committee members, this is a problem across the board. Whether it is truck, bus or automobiles, the only consistency when it comes to roundabouts is the consistent concern for the lack of consistency.

Speaker, there are no partisan politics here, just a relatively easy fix to make uniform rules for all, a fix that the Wynne government committee members refused to endorse. Again I made the case that this is not a small issue. In fact, I don't have my head in the sand, as a former minister once put it. This is not a solitary community issue. This isn't blue or orange or red; it's just simply smart policy based on road safety. But, once again, much as the previous and current Ministers of Transportation chose to ignore my calls and tie on the blinders, my renewed efforts to get the attention of the committee were met with a similar lack of urgency.

Oh, we heard the excuses. Again we were told that the Highway Traffic Act already covers the actions a driver must take in a roundabout. I want to once more draw attention to the fact that the word "roundabout" is never actually mentioned once in the existing legislation or in the Highway Traffic Act. In the meantime, the silence of the Highway Traffic Act gives way to differing interpretations, with the provincial government and municipalities calling for different practices. The fact that there's a lack of any mention whatsoever in the HTA leaves everyone—motorists, truckers, bus drivers, pedestrians and cyclist alike—with questions: "When can I enter? How do I exit? Where do pedestrians cross?" And, ultimately, "Who has the right of way?" The answers we've received to date, even offered up recently by the current minister, amount to little more than updated drivers' handbooks and a ministry website page with frequently asked questions, a brochure and a video. It's not enough.

The police understand this. The CAA, the Ontario Safety League and a list of others support these important

amendments to enhance road safety, and yet again, when I called for support from my colleagues from across the floor, I was not met with partnership, but more red herring reasons why we couldn't move forward.

The parliamentary assistant, who is here today, from our region of Waterloo, even tried to tell me in the committee that passing these amendments would delay passage of the bill itself—ridiculous.

I'll read from Hansard, just so that we've got this right: "In order to be able to investigate, look at, and properly consult about what's needed, it will delay the passage of this bill."

Quite frankly, as I and my colleague from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington argued, the concern was completely unwarranted. Lawyers later confirmed that there was nothing that would delay passage of the bill should my roundabout amendments have passed. Bottom line: There was absolutely no mechanism in this amendment that would slow down the passage of the bill whatsoever. It was simply an amendment that would ask the minister to start the consultation. Unfortunately, that consultation will have to wait.

Similarly, motorists in Ontario will have to wait for any sort of action to address what are commonly referred to as left lane hogs. We in the official opposition proposed that the safety concerns posed by left lane hogs be addressed through Bill 31, calling for any vehicle travelling at or below 10 kilometres per hour below the maximum speed limit to move over to the right, depending on weather or traffic conditions.

As I reported in committee, we all know, especially in the GTA, about gridlock on significant highways—400-series highways—and we have all seen folks who want to continue to drive in the passing lane at a slower speed than that at which traffic flows, therefore making it a substantial road safety issue. Oftentimes, drivers have to then pull out and pass, making it an extremely dangerous situation.

In fact, the BC government has moved to bring forward legislation similar to this amendment to actually provide some clarity but give the act some teeth.

Similarly here in Ontario, we've called for those teeth, as the act currently fails to provide clarity and doesn't give law enforcement the teeth it needs so that when and if they do lay a charge in court, the ticket will actually hold up.

We suggested setting a target of 10 kilometres. If you're travelling at 10 kilometres per hour or more below, you're going to get a ticket. That allows the authorities, the police, to not be subjective.

I won't keep you in suspense, Speaker, awaiting the result of our call for action on left lane hogs. There will be no action, as this amendment befell the same partisan-directed voting that spelled the end of all amendments that came before it.

All that said and despite the short shrift given all previous amendments, I did hold out hope that the promised partnership would come to light in discussing our amendment to require slowing down and moving over for snow plows and other road service vehicles.

Just so everyone clearly understands what we're talking about here, I'll read the actual, specific amendment out loud: "I move that section 159 of the act, as amended by section 48 of the bill, be further amended by adding the following subsections:

"Slow down for vehicle removing snow or ice

“(3.1) Upon approaching a road service vehicle that is used to plow, salt or de-ice a highway or to apply chemicals or abrasives to the highway for snow or ice control and that has a lamp producing intermittent flashes of blue light, whether the road service vehicle is stopped on the side of the highway or proceeding along the highway, the driver of a vehicle travelling on the same side of the highway,

“(a) shall slow down and proceed with caution, having due regard for traffic on and the conditions of the highway and the weather, to ensure that the driver does not collide with the road service vehicle or endanger any person outside of the road service vehicle; and

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“(b) if the road service vehicle is proceeding along the highway, shall follow the road service vehicle at a distance that is reasonable in the circumstances and shall only pass the road service vehicle if passing can be done in safety.

“Same, other road service vehicle

“(3.2) Upon approaching a road service vehicle, other than a road service vehicle described in subsection (3.1), with its lamp producing intermittent flashes of amber light that is stopped on the side of the highway, the driver of a vehicle travelling on the same side of the highway shall slow down and proceed with caution, having due regard for traffic on and the conditions of the highway and weather, to ensure that the driver does not collide with the road service vehicle or endanger any person outside of the road service vehicle.”

This amendment builds on the work my colleague Garfield Dunlop, from Simcoe North, initiated through a private member's bill that we see in Bill 31, requiring “slow down, move over” provisions for tow truck drivers who are at the side of the road. The amendment simply asks for the same sort of concept, perhaps, as applies to our snow removal vehicles and other road service vehicles.

This was, in fact, a suggestion brought forward by the Ontario Road Builders' Association. They're the voice of road building in Ontario. Their members build the majority of provincial and municipal roads, bridges and transportation infrastructure across the province, and employ in excess of 30,000 workers in peak season. Their association is constantly looking for ways to improve the health and safety of their workers, and continues to look for ways to collaborate with the MTO to ensure that our highways continue to consistently rank among the safest in North America—something I hear the minister talk a lot about.

One important step that can be taken to protect the health and safety of their workers is to expand the scope of this legislative amendment to include all highway

maintenance vehicles—including crash trucks, patrol vehicles and snowplows—on the list of vehicles that require slowing down by motorists.

Highway maintenance vehicles such as crash trucks and patrol vehicles are vital to the safety of their workers and the general motoring public, acting as first responders to accidents, closing lanes when safety hazards are present and creating security barriers to allow vital maintenance work to be undertaken on busy thoroughfares, among many other duties.

Workers in their industry perform work on Ontario highway networks daily, and, similar to tow trucks, their vehicles utilize amber flashing lights when performing this work. The road builders' association members have asked for equal consideration under the Highway Traffic Act to ensure the safety of their workers.

Additionally, the Ontario Road Builders' Association members would have liked to see snowplows included in the list of highway maintenance vehicles that require slowing down by motorists. Snowplows are equipped with blue flashing lights when performing work, and represent an essential component on Ontario roads, especially in the last few seasons, which saw a record amount of snowfall here in the province of Ontario.

I felt, and continue to feel, that "special consideration is warranted for snowplows, as statistics note that the majority of incidents involving snowplows are a result of motorists driving too close behind snowplows or attempting to pass snowplows. Following too close behind a snowplow can cause a driver to be blinded by the snow cloud ahead. Passing a snowplow can result in a collision, oftentimes fatal, with the side-mounted wing blade, a large blade mounted on the front which can swing to either side of the vehicle.

"On average, every winter, there are 132 collisions involving snowplows, a trend that is increasing every year, from 105 collisions involving snowplows in 2010 to 189 collisions involving snowplows in 2011. These statistics clearly reflect the fact that more consideration needs to be given to snowplows and the way they're regarded by the motorist public here in the province....

"Clearly, the numbers speak for themselves, and that's why we proceeded with this important road safety amendment: to simply include road safety vehicles like snowplows in this important road safety initiative."

While I asked the government committee members for their consideration to support this worthy amendment to make Ontario roads safer, we of course were shut down. Partnership over partisanship? I have yet to see it.

But it is not just me. Speaker, ask any of the opposition members who spoke out at committee. They were given the same treatment. In fact, my colleague from the riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex might as well have been speaking to a brick wall when he spoke so eloquently about the need for school bus cameras to be allowed as evidence in court. This is a very serious concern of school bus operators, simply because it is unfair for us to assume that a school bus driver, whose first and foremost obligation is to the safety of the children he or she is

either picking up or dropping off, will also be able to keep an eye on vehicles that fail to stop.

My colleague, in fact, had a situation back several years ago in his riding, when three children from a family were killed. He also had a serious incident back in his riding where a small child dropped a piece of clothing. The bus driver didn't see that the child actually went in front of the bus to get the piece of clothing that had fallen off. Of course, the child was unfortunately run over. Drivers don't have the time to ensure the students get on the buses or get off the buses safely when they still try to capture information, where they have to write it down in terms of perhaps the colour or the make of the vehicle and the time when it occurred.

The other challenge that the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex, who just joined us here now, highlighted is that a lot of police forces are not in a position to actually go after drivers who fail to stop. Of course, they can go after them once they obtain the information. But basically, at that point in time, all they do is knock on their door. The member pointed out that this type of legislation is happening in many other jurisdictions in the United States, as well as Canada. There have been numerous states that have already passed laws allowing the use of cameras on school buses to capture video images of motorists illegally passing and endangering our children. Prince Edward Island has in fact passed specific legislation, and they've started many different pilot projects throughout the country. Manitoba also has school boards using cameras as well. The police services group up in Ottawa is also working with an independent school bus operator on a pilot project.

The member for Chatham-Kent provided a section of a letter of support that he received from the Ontario School Bus Association. They went on to say that they support this particular amendment, "which proposes the use of cameras on school buses to capture video images of motorists illegally passing school buses stopped with their red warning lights flashing. The video images can" also "be used by police as evidence to prosecute owners of offending vehicles rather than the driver. These cameras, commonly referred to as stop-arm cameras, have proven effective in other jurisdictions across North America by increasing the prosecution rate and raising awareness of the consequences of breaking the law."

The safety of our children is what is important here. Every day, hundreds of children are needlessly put at risk as drivers speed by stopped school buses. Catching drivers who endanger our children is critical.

This amendment would have made it easier for school bus drivers to do their jobs. Also, as the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex put it, it would have allowed us to "work together to support the people in our lives whom we love and cherish the most, that being our children, our grandchildren and perhaps even great-grandchildren as well." Unfortunately, that proposal to work together was again denied by the committee.

So, too, another of my colleagues, this time from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, saw his amendment pro-

posals slam up against the partisan wall of denial government had formed on the other side of the table. The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke proposed an amendment that would have added a new section 53.1 to legislate penalties for motorists driving with accumulated snow on top of their vehicles. I personally thought that this was a well-reasoned and thoughtful amendment to Bill 31. However, the members opposite didn't seem to agree. We were fortunate to have the member speak to his amendment in committee, and I wanted to recap some of his main points here today.

This amendment was introduced as a private member's bill. It was introduced in response to a specific event in the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke's riding. A man by the name of Gord Stickles was driving his Dodge Caravan on Highway 41. Around the Snake River turn, he met a tractor-trailer with a 53-foot trailer. There was a serious accumulation of snow on top of the trailer, 53 feet long and up to five inches thick. When he rounded that corner, the tractor-trailer lost all of the ice off the top of the trailer. It came crashing down. Had Mr. Stickles not acted in a very quick manner, it's likely he could have been killed. There was, however, very serious damage done to the vehicle.

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As the member stated, "This is not about when somebody's driving through a snowstorm and there's an accumulation on the vehicle, obviously. This is one where there had been a freeze-thaw cycle, and maybe more than one, as a tractor-trailer sat in a loading yard, and no attempt was made to free the ice and snow from that trailer. It's been allowed to go through a couple of these freeze-thaw cycles, embedding that and making it far more heavy and dangerous when they hit the road. Then you get a sunny day which, as you're travelling, starts to loosen that, and all of a sudden it can come off in one fell swoop."

This legislation exists in the province of Quebec and other provinces. It exists in several northern continental states. By having this in the legislation, it gives the police the authority to cite someone if they're not in compliance with the legislation.

This bill is about road safety. I think this amendment would have made our roads safer. I would say that, Speaker, because, of course, this was yet another amendment that failed to make it past the Liberal bloc.

Even when we attempted to help government deal with one of the most frustrating issues facing every constituency office across this province—the medical review of drivers' licences—even these attempts were thwarted.

My colleague from Lanark made an excellent argument for a little accountability that would go a long way when it comes to a system that is clearly broken when it comes to MTO review of medical reports for drivers who have had their licence suspended due to medical concerns.

The amendment was very simple in calling for (1) medical review subjects to be notified upon receipt of medical reports by MTO; and (2) ensuring that the

subject's report is reviewed and responded to within 30 days of receipt, which is something the minister claims is being done 98% of the time, so it really shouldn't be a problem to include it in the bill, right? Not so fast.

As the MPP from Lanark noted, our amendment would have taken the ministry's public service commitment and made it a statutory obligation that MTO must—not may, but they must—then inform the person who is impacted.

I'm going to quote the member for a second time here, from Hansard. He said that "we have a duty and an obligation by the state—if the state is going to take an action against an individual, at the minimum we have a duty to inform that individual first, especially if there are serious consequences—and driving under suspension is a serious consequence, not only monetarily but also demerit points...."

Yet, Speaker, we hear and see, time and time again, stories of unknowing motorists pulled over for a suspended licence that they were never informed had been suspended. We continue to hear and see repeated stories of motorists having to put their lives on hold while MTO drags its feet well beyond the supposed 30-business-day review timeline.

Now, Speaker, we all want our roads to be safe. There are those out there with medical concerns who, obviously, under supervision of medical professionals, have said that they are not fit to drive. That's not what we're talking about here. There are many instances when medical conditions should prevent a person from having a licence.

Obviously, we want to take the time to review and make sure we get it right. Absolutely we agree with that. But it's the time to actually get the folks to review the file that's the problem. Thirty business days is ridiculous, and I can tell you, from numerous reports, that even that ridiculous timeline is not kept.

That's why we're taking a stand on behalf of the many, many constituents across the province. We simply asked for notice that would require a review and response within 30 days, providing the ministry with one month, as opposed to business days, to ensure that subject motorists are not forced to unduly put their lives and livelihoods on hold, simply for an automatic review. Again, it's not to get your licence back. It's simply to review the file. It's far too long to have to wait.

While I again have to report that Liberal government committee members failed to put partnership ahead of partisanship, I must also report that the specific section of Bill 31 that we attempted to amend opens a Pandora's box of impacts and further delays, should it move ahead as written.

Speaker, instead of finding ways to tighten up the system and fix what's broken, government is going the other way, expanding the list of those who can report to MTO to take away a subject motorist's licence. Motorists across the province should get ready, because soon anyone from a massage therapist to your speech-language pathologist will be able to call for your licence to be removed.

Here's the list of occupations being considered to report: acupuncturist, traditional Chinese medicine practitioner, audiologist, speech-language pathologist, chiropract, chiropractor, dental hygienist, dental technologist, dentist, optician, optometrist, pharmacist, psychologist, respiratory therapist, and even veterinarian. I think it's pretty obvious that we're not enthused about the additional coverage.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Veterinarian?

Mr. Michael Harris: True story.

And we've heard recently that these professionals are being paid to do this. They're being paid. So how much is this going to cost?

All in all, Bill 31's direction toward medical review of drivers' licences is cause for concern across the province. The fact that government members failed to support amendments that would have at least brought some certainty to subject motorists only deepens that concern.

Speaker, we also introduced an amendment to update regulation 316/03 under the Highway Traffic Act and allow utility task vehicle, or UTV, owners the same rights to drive on designated roads and trails as ATV owners, something the government has already agreed to and yet continues to stall on, despite all-party support. The members from Timiskaming-Cochrane and Parry Sound—my colleague, of course—have both brought forth private members' bills to step in where government has stalled.

Even the government member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell put forth a motion to make rules fairer for off-road vehicle drivers across the board. When speaking in the House, the member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell said that he received support from numerous people and organizations: Glenn Draper from ATV Ontario, Wayne Daub from the Ontario Federation of All-Terrain Vehicle Clubs, Peter Wood from the Ontario Federation of 4WD Recreationists, and the list goes on and on.

Down in my neck of the woods, in New Hamburg, Ontario Drive and Gear has been manufacturing the Argo since the 1960s, a vehicle that has a world-renowned reputation for its versatility and capability in traversing difficult terrain.

Updating regulations to reflect what is available to safely ride between trails and properties on rural highways will generate greater demand for these Ontario products and, in turn, help create well-paying jobs.

It has already been a decade too long. It's time to kick-start this needed change and allow off-road vehicle owners to drive on designated roads, highways and trails with other all-terrain vehicles.

And yet, despite the obvious support right across the board for this kick-start, we remain in neutral, or at the very least spinning our wheels, as government committee members failed to endorse an amendment that speaks directly to the Glengarry-Prescott-Russell MPP's previous motion. Never mind partnership with the opposition; these Liberal committee members wouldn't even partner with their own colleague.

Finally, Speaker, I do want to speak for a moment about one amendment that we attempted to put forward but were prevented from due to government members voting out a section of their own bill. Yes, you heard it right. Specifically, we had hoped to ensure that municipalities would be able to move on powers to collect unpaid fines as soon as possible, basically ensuring these powers would come into force the day the bill received royal assent.

After years of waiting for the government to grant municipalities the power to withhold licence renewal pending the payment of unpaid fines, AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and its municipalities definitely welcome the opportunity and added revenue that Bill 31 allows. For far too long, municipalities have been forced to wait for these powers to be granted, while watching countless millions of dollars in fines go uncollected.

Our amendment would have ensured powers for fine collection immediately after royal assent. Again, the reason we put this forward is that there had been talk as to when municipalities will actually be able to collect unpaid fines. Some have suggested it could take months, if not years, after this bill passes for municipalities to actually have the power to collect unpaid fines. Very simply, our amendment sought some clarity in fine collection for municipalities, putting an actual date on it to ensure that when this bill is proclaimed, municipalities will then have the power to collect those unpaid fines.

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That said, Speaker, I do have to report one final time that this amendment failed to be included in the updated third reading that we obviously see before us today, but not because government members voted against it. They actually never had that opportunity, because they had, in a bizarre turn of events on day 1 of clause-by-clause, voted out a pertinent section of their own bill that had impacts on unpaid fine collection, drug-impaired driving and pedestrian crossovers—day 1. Of course, in the end, the result was the same, unfortunately: partisanship over partnership.

And so, after three days of clause-by-clause and many hours of debate, we continue to question what happened to Premier Kathleen Wynne and the government that committed to partnership over partisanship, because we saw no evidence of that commitment in committee, none whatsoever. Where is the Wynne government that told us they would "engage all Ontarians as full partners in solving the challenges we face as individuals, as communities, as businesses and as a province"? Where is that government that would "put evidence before ideology and choose partnership over partisanship, and invite everyone to work together, with and through government, to overcome all of our challenges and to thrive as a result"?

Speaker, I've had an opportunity to meet with many of our road safety partners since my appointment as transportation critic by our interim leader, Jim Wilson. I want to thank them for the work that they do, the ongoing

work that they do. There are many, many organizations throughout the province of Ontario. We all think back to the work that MADD did to tackle impaired driving—we now know that distracted driving is one of the major leading factors in vehicle deaths today; and the great work that the CAA does, right across this province, educating their members and working with legislators to ensure that our roads are in fact one of the safest in North America; and the Ontario Safety League and our local police enforcement agencies.

I want to thank, specifically, the Waterloo region police, and its new chief, Chief Bryan Larkin, who stood with me and called for increased safety at roundabouts. I want to thank him for that, knowing that these are now a reality of our roads and that we actually need to do something.

Speaker, I submit that Bill 31 represented a true opportunity to put those words into action, to understand that government does not have ownership of all the answers, and to work with colleagues across the floor, enhancing and amending laws aimed at making Ontario roads safer. It was an opportunity that was missed, and I regret that government members chose partisanship instead.

I will end my hour here. I will look forward to questions and comments on Bill 31, and I'll leave it at that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate the member for Kitchener—Conestoga on his very well-informed and comprehensive lead. I had the opportunity to review the transcript of the committee which he participated in and which he referred to during his remarks. I certainly am aware of the efforts that he made to introduce some changes to this bill, to address some of the issues that he felt were important, on behalf of the people he represents.

There was one particular issue he mentioned that really struck a chord with me as MPP for London West, because it is an issue of considerable concern to my constituents, and that is the reinstatement of drivers' licences after a licence has been suspended for a medical condition. Certainly, the member from Kitchener—Conestoga talked about the concern of a licence being suspended without the driver being aware that the suspension has been implemented, and some people who have been surprised to be pulled over to find out that their driver's licence is under suspension because a medical condition had been reported. Certainly that is a problem for drivers who are in that situation. It is something that should be addressed.

The main concern of my constituents is about the time that it takes to get their driver's licence reinstated, not just the process of review. As he said, we want to make sure that that review protects the safety of other motorists on the road as well as the driver, but also the process to get to the review stage, because we know that sometimes people have waited months and months for their review to take place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'm glad to have an opportunity to do a couple of minutes, a wrap-up, on the member opposite's hour-long conversation on Bill 31. I am very glad to hear that he is supportive of road safety, but I'm still a bit surprised that he talks about partisanship over partnership because, interestingly, the policy adviser from MTO contacted the member from Kitchener—Conestoga a number of times during this process, and he chose not to meet with them. MTO offered to discuss Bill 31 amendments but he didn't respond to them. Any out-of-order amendments that he talked about could have possibly been worked out if he had chosen to respond and to meet with them, because some of the sections he's talking about from the Highway Traffic Act weren't open. The email showed that the PC transportation critic refused to discuss ways to make his amendments work. He didn't respond, so I believe that he chose partisanship over partnership.

As a matter of fact, the member opposite wanted to discuss roundabouts and was told that Bill 31 was not the particular vehicle to deal with them and that we could look at his concerns later, as looking at it right now was going to delay the bill for a number of months.

He also mentions that, inadvertently, a staff procedural error meant that one minor section out of 64 in total was inadvertently removed from the bill. Immediately upon realizing this, PC and NDP committee members were asked for agreement to reinsert that minor section 4. They chose to play partisan games and did not agree to this. The minor section of the bill has no impact on what the bill will achieve regarding an increase of penalties to distracted and alcohol- or drug-impaired drivers. The minor section is administrative and is included in Bill 85, the Strengthening and Improving Government Act.

I call upon all members of the House to save lives and make sure of the speedy passage of Bill 31.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I was very impressed with this one-hour speech on Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act, presented by our opposition transportation critic, Michael Harris. Obviously, someone has been burning the midnight oil in pulling this research together. To craft 30 well-thought-out amendments, I understand, is something; it took over the course of three days to present these amendments. Every one of them was shot down by the government.

As the critic has pointed out in this case, partisanship trumps partnership. That's the obvious theme of this legislation. That really is quite regrettable. As he has just indicated, the government members sitting on the committee got so used to shooting down amendments that they inadvertently shot down some of their own amendments. I guess it's one more reason to lose confidence in what's going on across the way.

I picked up on the use of language, the mantra, with respect to cellphone use on a bicycle, which doesn't

make a heck of a lot of sense. As he has indicated, "If you have to grab it to" use it, "you shouldn't."

1610

The bill increases fines for distracted operation of a vehicle, but there is no mention of demerit points. Something that our critic has advocated for, that must be crushing for this member, the work that he has done on roundabouts—to present his case for roundabout legislation and to have that rejected, that is really getting painful.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's once again an honour to be able to stand in this House and to comment on the member from Kitchener—Conestoga regarding Bill 31.

I'd like to pick up on an issue that he brought up, and that was UTVs. We have been pushing for a long time to make UTVs legal. Actually, it's something that we all agree on. The member from Kitchener—Conestoga and the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka brought it up. The member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell actually put a motion forward, which we all agreed to.

Lo and behold, in Bill 31, they did make some changes regarding off-road vehicles. They did. In subsection 178(4), they are going to amend subsection 191.8(3) by striking out "and low pressure bearing tires." That allows municipalities to permit "off-road vehicles with three or more wheels and low pressure bearing tires." So they took out the low-pressure-bearing-tire part, but they didn't fix the problem where they had the opportunity. We all agree that we need to change this legislation, because, as we speak here, there are people in my riding, seniors who are changing the oil in their UTV, and they're probably going to commit a criminal act by driving to their camp.

I demand to know when the Minister of Transportation and the Premier are actually going to fix this problem, which we all know is a problem. It's not going to cost anybody any money, and they are refusing to act. The time to act is now, before these vehicles are out on the trails, out on the roads. We need to do it now, and we could do it now. It's a regulation. They chose not to do it here, but it could easily be done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We return to the member from Kitchener—Conestoga for his reply.

Mr. Michael Harris: I think, to summarize the previous member's two minutes in a few words, it would be that they chose partisanship over partnership, quite simply said.

Look, I've got only a minute and 48 seconds left, and I really just want to, again, thank those road safety partners who day in, day out do the important work on our roads to make them safer in Ontario. I've listed the stakeholders throughout my remarks, but I really want to thank them again for their hard work.

Of course, I want to thank the official opposition members for bringing forward some novel, insightful, progressive ideas that I've mentioned today that I included in those amendments. Some of them were

included in the bill previously, like the member from Simcoe's and the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka's, but, as you can see, there are many more that were supported by many of our road safety partners that could have easily been included in Bill 31—take them out of committee—we all know that there are backlogs in committee—get them into the bill and make them law when we, in fact, have the Highway Traffic Act opened up and before us at this time.

Now, I know the kids in the short pants bring the notes over to the members, and they read them and they recite them. I really hope that they don't believe a lot of the things that they read oftentimes. I know they don't get a chance to read them and understand, perhaps, what they all mean. That's unfortunate, because I really think that the parliamentary secretary's two minutes will actually inform viewers of what we experienced in committee, that, in fact, it was partisanship over partnership here.

We all want to make roads safer—absolutely. We support many of the aspects of Bill 31, and we'll, in fact, be supporting it, because that is our end goal.

I want to thank my staff Rob, Rebecca and Aaron for putting the time in to bring this all together. They've worked hard, and I want to leave it at that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Before I begin, I'd like to seek unanimous consent for the NDP to stand down its lead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for London West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the NDP's lead on third reading of this bill. Agreed? Agreed.

The member for London West has the floor.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker. It is always an honour to stand in this House on behalf of the people we represent in our various ridings, and it's a particular pleasure for me, as the MPP for London West, to participate in this debate today around third reading of Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act.

As I mentioned a couple of minutes ago, I took the opportunity when I was preparing for this speech to read the transcript of the committee on general government that considered the bill after it was referred to committee following second reading. I have to say that I was interested to see that the bill before us today, which went through that committee input process and very detailed clause-by-clause consideration, is identical to what was passed at second reading. Really, the only thing that changed, as a result of those six long days of committee deliberation, is one minor change to the definition of "pedestrian crossover."

There really are two ways that you could interpret this: Either the Liberals got it exactly right the first time—the legislation was so perfect that it didn't require any amendment at all—or the Liberals felt that they didn't need to listen to what the people of Ontario had to say in the amendments that were brought forward by elected MPPs who were participating on the committee, each of which was rejected by the government members on the

committee. Frankly, I think it is much more the latter than the former interpretation.

Bill 31 is a comprehensive piece of legislation that combines two bills that were brought forward earlier, in the last Parliament. It brings in the Highway Traffic Statute Law Amendment Act, which was previously known as Bill 34. This legislation was designed to give municipalities additional tools to collect defaulted traffic fines from drivers.

Bill 31 also brings in the former Bill 173, which was the Highway Traffic Amendment Act. That bill was designed to enhance pedestrian, driver and cyclist safety, and also reduce impaired and distracted driving.

In addition to these two former pieces of legislation, Bill 31 also includes some important new measures to address drugged driving, as well as introducing stiffer penalties for distracted driving and, finally, amending the Highway 407 East Act.

We hear from the OPP that, without question, distracted driving has become the number one killer on Ontario's roads. OPP statistics show that 78 people died in distracted-driving-related collisions in 2013. That is many more than the 57 impaired driving deaths and the 44 speed-related deaths. So this is a real concern. It has to be a priority for the province to get those fatalities down, and these distracted driving provisions are an important strategy to do that.

I suspect that many of us in this Legislature—certainly more than one of us—have been guilty, at some time or other, of looking at our cellphones while we are driving. Maybe we are stopped at an intersection, and we just want to steal a moment to look and see what's going on. But sometimes we look at our phones while we are on the road.

1620

This is a particular concern when we think about young people. We know how addicted young people are to their technology and how hard it is for them to be away from their technology and unconnected from social media and how tempting it is for young people to want to look at their cellphones while they are driving.

One can't help but feel a sense of real and profound grief when you read about the final tweets that people sent just before they are involved in a head-on collision, and a fatality results. I think we've all seen those stories in the media of these very poignant final messages that were sent out.

With Bill 31, drivers who are caught looking at display screens or handheld devices while they are driving will face increased fines and also demerit points. Importantly, the graduated licensing system will be revised to also include a prohibition on distracted driving. Hopefully this will help deter young people from looking at their phones and will engrain good driving practices in young people before they become fully licensed drivers and they won't be tempted to look at their phones while they are behind the wheel of a vehicle.

The new provisions that are included in the bill to address drugged driving are similar to those that are in

place in other jurisdictions. New physical coordination tests will now be conducted in the field. This provision should help increase convictions for drugged driving, which have typically in the past been very low. MADD points out that in 2012, there were 60,000 charges laid in Canada for impaired driving, but less than 2% were for drug impairment. We also know that without the evidence to convict drivers who have drug impairments, there have been some very high-profile cases of drugged driving that have resulted in acquittal.

Bill 31 also allows for administrative driver's licence suspensions, which are identical to the existing provisions that apply to drunk driving in the Highway Traffic Act. When a police officer who is trained in administering a standardized field sobriety test reasonably believes that the driver is drug-impaired, the legislation will allow for escalating licence suspensions of three days for a first offence, seven days for a second offence within a five-year period, or 30 days for three or more offences within a five-year period. Bill 31 also allows for 90-day licence suspensions and seven-day vehicle impoundments when a trained drug recognition expert believes that the driver is impaired.

These changes are all welcomed and supported by many groups, like MADD and the CAA, that have been advocating on these issues for years. On this side of the House, I can say that New Democrats and the people that we represent in our ridings welcome these changes as an important step to improve driver safety on Ontario roads.

What we are concerned about, however, in this legislation—there are several things that concern us, but one of the very problematic aspects of Bill 31 is the privatization of motor vehicle inspections that the bill introduces. The bill enables the introduction of broad regulations that will replace the current vehicle licensing system with a completely new system under an unspecified model. The model will be prescribed in the regulations.

This effectively allows the outsourcing of vehicle inspections to a private operator. We understand that a fully private model that is similar to Taron—and I don't think I'm the only MPP in this House who gets emails raising major concerns about Taron's lack of accountability. Another private model that has many Ontarians concerned is the Technical Standards and Safety Authority. This is another model that the new vehicle licensing system could be fashioned after. We do understand that these are the models that the government is looking at as it moves to outsource motor vehicle licensing.

Under these models, the administrator of the new vehicle inspection centre system would not be an agent of the crown. The administrator would be exempt from normal oversight by the government agencies committee, the Ombudsman and the Auditor General, unless there is a service agreement with the ministry that allows for such oversight. As we know, the province currently licenses and oversees private motor vehicle inspection centres to certify regular passenger vehicles and commercial

vehicles. We are aware that there is considerable variation in the quality of the inspections, and we do recognize that there is a need for action to prevent what are called “lick and stick” services that fraudulently certify unsafe vehicles in exchange for a payoff and as a result undermine public confidence in commercial vehicle safety. This is a problem and it has to be addressed.

But these were problems that were identified as far back as 2008, when the Auditor General released a report that found that “the ministry does not exercise adequate oversight of this process and has little effective control over the issuance of safety standard certificates to inspection stations.” This was in an Auditor General’s report of 2008. The ministry has had several years since that report to look at how oversight can be improved, how some of these flaws can be rectified and how we can assure the public of the safety of motor vehicles.

We agree that there is a need to overhaul the existing system, but we have serious reservations about the path that the government has chosen to address these concerns. We have serious reservations about the lack of accountability, the lack of transparency and the lack of oversight that is associated with a private model. Frankly, Speaker, who can blame us? Just look at what happened when the Tories, under Mike Harris, privatized the driver licensing system in 2003. At that time, they signed a 10-year contract with Serco, the multi-national outsourcing corporation. This turned out to be a disaster, basically from day one. There was a prolonged strike in 2009 that inconvenienced hundreds of thousands of Ontario drivers. Yet, despite all of the problems with the outsourcing to Serco, the Liberal government renewed the Serco contract in 2013. Not a year later Ontarians learned, through the Toronto Star, that Serco was not testing tractor-trailer drivers on highways and that a loophole was allowing unregulated licence mills to train truck drivers without any ministry oversight whatsoever.

However, under the terms of this renewed contract, the contract that was signed, again, in 2013, Serco is allowed to self-police and self-report, and is also permitted to keep its reports secret, removed from any kind of public scrutiny. Serco doesn’t even have to let the government know how many inspectors, if any, oversee its operations.

1630

Clearly, Ontarians’ experience with Serco and with unregulated truck driver testing shows the risks of outsourcing to unaccountable private companies. Instead of fixing poor oversight over the existing, publicly accountable, motor vehicle inspection centres, the government has chosen to move ahead with legislation that will outsource the motor vehicle inspection centre system to a private administrator. This, as I said, is a major concern for New Democrats and also for Ontarians.

In my remaining time, I want to focus on some of the provisions of Bill 31 that deal with cycling safety. When I spoke to Bill 31 at second reading, I talked about some of the great work that is going on in my community to promote cycling and encourage more Londoners to cycle. Following that debate, several Londoners contacted me

to express their support for Bill 31, precisely because of the measures that it includes to improve cycling safety. While we do have very legitimate concerns about some of the provisions of Bill 31, I do want to say that New Democrats will be supporting this bill. That’s not to say that it couldn’t have been improved, but we will be supporting it, even though the Liberals refused to make changes.

Some of the Londoners who support Bill 31 are members of London Cycle Link. I wanted to share with MPPs some of the research that they gave me about cycling in London and why cycling safety is such an important strategy to encourage people to cycle. What they have found is that less than 2% of Londoners cycle regularly and only 9% choose active transportation: cycling or walking. London Cycle Link has a goal to increase these numbers to 8% for cycling and 15% for active transportation. They want to make cycling the simplest, most convenient and safest option available so that citizens can easily choose cycling as their preferred mode of everyday transportation. To achieve that goal, cycling safety provisions and new protections for pedestrian crossings are important and welcome new measures that will contribute to increasing the number of cyclists.

Earlier today we talked about the gender pay gap because it’s Equal Pay Day today. In that discussion, we talked about the importance of applying a gender lens to public policy issues. I want to commend London Cycle Link for doing some gender-based analysis of cycling issues in the city. They found out that there are less than 2% of Londoners who now cycle regularly, but almost three quarters of those who cycle are male. Increasing the number of cyclists in our community requires some effort to shift gendered perceptions of cycling to make sure that everyone feels welcome to take up cycling and participate in cycling.

Another part of their research showed that there’s a general perception within the community that cycling is unsafe. They welcome the measures that are included in Bill 31 to improve cycling safety through contraflow lanes; through the one-metre distance, which was originally proposed by my colleague the member for Parkdale–High Park; and also for cyclists to have flashing red lights and to ride on paved shoulders of unrestricted highways.

This bill includes a number of welcome safety protections for Ontarians. It also includes some new approaches that are of concern. But on the whole, New Democrats support the bill and will be pleased to see it through third reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Cambridge.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Can I—

Interjections.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Trinity–Spadina. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You’re both standing.

The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you. It was very kind of the member from Cambridge to give me her time to respond to the debate just offered by the member from London West.

That was a very in-depth debate. I applaud you for some of the points that you brought forward. There were some valid concerns that you listed. I look forward to the discussion at committee and, hopefully, some of those will get answered there.

This bill is a great bill for Ontarians in terms of enhancing road safety. It has measures on impaired driving and controlling drugs and alcohol, which we all know might result in disaster and pain that would potentially be suffered by Ontario families. As a parent, I think this is very timely, and I applaud the government for doing so.

The member from London West spent time talking about safeguarding cyclists across the province. I'm very proud that our government has taken a very progressive step towards ensuring that cycling is part of our transportation culture. We're really enhancing this culture. When you look at the suburbs—not just in the downtown core, but in the suburban areas—there are more and more users of our roads who are cyclists, and that one-metre rule will help them to feel safer on the roads. I know that through our Cycle Ontario strategy, we're building more bicycle lanes, not just in the urban areas but in the suburbs as well.

I'm very pleased to be part of this debate. I have been hearing a lot of good points coming from the opposition side. I'm very proud of our government for actually putting this on the discussion and moving forward on this initiative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pretty happy to provide a couple of moments of comment to the great speech by the member for London West. I thought she did a very good job.

I was a little bit surprised, with all due respect, through you, Speaker, to the member for Trinity-Spadina, because I think I heard him talk at first about this bill going to committee. Well, the bill is back from committee. We're now having third reading debate.

I think the speech from the member for London West really highlighted what the whole problem was. We had six days of hearings. We had numerous suggestions. There was amendment after amendment after amendment tabled at the committee, and the government members voted them down.

I think she used the words “did the government get?”—because the bill is essentially the same as it was before it went to committee, other than the section of their own bill that the government voted down. Did they get it exactly right? I think we all know the answer: No, because there were some very pragmatic ideas that were shot down, just because the government became partisan.

Did they want to listen? I think that was the other point that the member made at the start. I think it's pretty obvious they didn't want to listen.

The member for Kitchener-Conestoga brought up that even something like his Safe Roundabouts Act could have been incorporated in some way in this bill to really—the name of the bill is the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act. He had some great amendments that would make our roads safer. He had some great suggestions that would make our roads safer. Time after time, the government just blindly becomes partisan and votes them down.

I was glad that the member for London West put so many great points on the record today, not just from her own riding but looking at the bigger picture for the province of Ontario.

Again, make no mistake: This government was partisan. This government was closed-minded. There were many, many improvements to this bill that aren't part of it because of that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

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Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It is a delight to comment upon my colleague from London West. She does something that's unfortunately quite unusual in this place, and that is that she actually does her own research. She actually spends some time to, first of all, read the bill and to look at her own community and the impact the bill has on her community. She doesn't just read off the canned notes provided by—whichever political party, really; we all get them. She does her own thinking, she does her own responses, and I think that's really admirable, so I want to herald that in her talk.

She also talked, of course, about the fact that none of the amendments were listened to. In fact, it was so bad that the members of the Liberal Party actually voted against their own amendments, because they were so used to voting against all the amendments.

I have to say, one of them is particularly shameful. I want to herald the work of Share The Road, a phenomenal organization. Share the Road were in absolute agreement with the coroner's report that said we need mandatory sideguards for all large trucks, to save cyclists' lives, and sadly, the Liberals voted against that amendment as well, something that a federal member of the New Democratic Party put forward.

Obviously we are all very concerned in the New Democratic Party about increasing privatization, and here's yet another example: the motor vehicle inspection centre system. It begs the question, Mr. Speaker, that after the Conservative government has privatized this and then the Liberal government has privatized what's left, what is the role for government? What is the role for government when we have privatized all the services that our citizens use? This is a right-wing dream in this place.

I'm going to talk more about that maybe a little later, but seriously, yet another privatization move, yet another poison pill in a bill that has some good aspects for which we're going to vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I'm proud to rise this afternoon to speak on Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act. Mr. Speaker, as you know, for the last 13 years Ontario has been ranked either first or second in North America for road safety, and our government is proud of our record of having among the safest roads in North America. But we know that there is always more that we can do to improve our road safety programs. As always, keeping our roads safe is the highest priority for our government.

Bill 31 not only serves to protect drivers on our roads, it also introduces a number of provisions that will help keep pedestrians and cyclists safe in Ontario. The road safety issues that the bill aims to address continue to be persistent challenges in Ontario, and while we have seen success with our distracted-driving law and public education efforts, distracted driving continues to be a growing problem on the province's roads.

The proposal would change the existing legislated fine range of \$50 to \$500, and increase it to \$300 to \$1,000 as a penalty upon conviction for distracted driving. This is part of why we have seen so much support, even outside this Legislature, for this particular bill. MTO has consulted with a number of key stakeholders who collectively would have and have contributed to the cycling amendments being brought forward by this bill.

The safety of all road users, including cyclists, is of paramount importance to the Ministry of Transportation, and we encourage all road users to share the road. These amendments are largely responsive to requests by municipalities and key stakeholders, including the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario's Cycling Death Review released in 2012.

#CycleON Action Plan 1.0 was released on April 14, 2014, which committed to introducing legislative and regulatory amendments to promote cyclist safety. This is good news for all the cyclists I have in my riding of Davenport, and for cyclists across the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments, and I return to the member for London West for her response.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the member for Trinity-Spadina, the member for Leeds-Grenville, the member for Parkdale-High Park and the member for Davenport for offering some thoughts on my remarks.

I want to continue on where the member from Davenport left off, on the issue around the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Certainly, we couldn't agree more that this has to be a high priority for this government, but as the member for Parkdale-High Park pointed out, one of the measures that has been found again and again by the coroner as critical to protect cyclists and pedestrians—that is, mandatory truck side guards—was rejected by the Liberal government. That's a concern for us.

There was a report in 2010, another report in 2012 and a renewed call in 2013 from the Ontario coroner to introduce mandatory truck side guards, but the government chose not to proceed.

There are some good measures included in Bill 31, but there is still a lot of work to do if we are going to create a culture where people feel that if they cycle they will be safe on the roads. As I mentioned, the work of London Cycle Link in my community certainly has found that people's concerns about the safety of cycling is a real barrier to them taking up cycling.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I want to commend the member for London West for her advocacy. I know London Cycle Link; I hope they're watching today. It's a great group of people. When I ran Share the Road, we had a great relationship with London Cycle Link. Good for you for noting their hard work today in the House.

It's my pleasure to stand in this House today to speak to Bill 31, the Transportation Statute Law Amendment Act (Making Ontario's Roads Safer). As many of you know, prior to my election to office here at Queen's Park, I founded and ran the Share the Road Cycling Coalition. Before I start, please permit me—my apologies. I'd like to share my time with the member from Kitchener Centre, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, and the member from Mississauga-Streetsville.

While at Share the Road, we worked closely with the provincial government on the creation of this bill in its previous form, and I'm very proud of what we accomplished. It is also worth noting that this bill is an amalgam of many pieces of opposition-led and opposition-driven legislative amendments. In doing so, it's so important to note that co-operation is part of the hallmark of this place. It is what Ontarians want us to do and it's when we're at our best. In doing so, I'd like to give a shout-out to the member from Parkdale-High Park for her work on cycling and her cycling advocacy work—it's of long standing—and the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, who has done excellent work on paved shoulders in this place when I was at Share the Road. Now that advocacy work continues.

Through the hard work of dedicated officials, elected members and advocates in the cycling community, along with many others, we've been able to produce a piece of legislation that will do much to make the roads safer for every Ontarian, whether it be a pedestrian, a cyclist or a motorist. Promoting active transportation and cycling safety in our province is of the utmost importance.

The member from London West noted the coroner's review. I sat on the coroner's review. I was privileged to sit on the coroner's review into cycling deaths. Between 2006 and 2012, 125 souls lost their lives in Ontario while riding their bikes. That review comprised a great deal of Share the Road's work, and I'm proud to say that as a government we listened and a number of those recommendations are now being realized in Bill 31. By making simple changes to the rules of our roads, we can drastically reduce the number of fatalities and collisions in our province, saving lives and reducing the negative impacts on families right across our province.

The one-metre safe passing law, notably, included in this bill, will require drivers to give cyclists a minimum

of one metre safe passing, where practical. While this may not seem significant, giving cyclists adequate space when passing them on a road or highway will help to avoid collisions and near misses, preventing serious injury and even death.

It is also a critical mechanism for education and awareness. When I was at Share the Road, we worked closely with CAA, a valued partner to this government, in communicating the importance of safety and of sharing the road.

Also included in this bill is a provision to allow cyclists to cycle on the paved shoulders of highways. Earlier I mentioned the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka; he's been working at this for years. This is something that is currently not allowed under the Highway Traffic Act and it was a long-overdue amendment. Bicyclists, like motorists, use highways all across this province to reach their destinations, whether it be cycling to work, school, for a journey or for fun. This is a critically important mechanism to keep people safe. Allowing cyclists to use paved shoulders will help to keep them out of harm's way, creating a buffer space between them and motor vehicles. As I stated previously, simple changes like this can greatly improve our ability to share the roadways that we all use.

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By increasing safety measures for all active transportation users, we don't just reduce or mitigate the number of collisions and injuries. When people feel safer riding their bicycles in the areas where they live, they are far more likely to do so. I think several members have alluded today to the importance of cycling and the contribution that it makes to congestion mitigation, to improving our air and so on. It also contributes significantly to economic development. But six out of 10 Ontarians are afraid to ride their bike, and that is why these amendments and Bill 31 are so important. By encouraging more people in communities across Ontario to get out and ride their bikes, we can help grow our economy. In 2010 alone, two million Canadians visited Ontario to participate in cycling activities, and they spent \$391 million.

Of course, Quebec's economy benefits from about \$140 million a year from cycling tourism as a result of La Route verte, a 4,300-kilometre system that spans their province. I'm proud to say that as a result of Ontario's cycling strategy, launched in 2013, our province is also moving in that direction and that will mean jobs and vitality for Ontarians right across this province. It will mean increased safety, too, to the betterment of all of us. Bicycle tourists spend more per day than non-cycling tourists. They tend to pack lightly and pick up supplies along the way. I know this; I've done it myself. When we make people feel safer on our roads, they are far more likely to ride their bikes in these communities, ride more often, and encourage their friends to do the same.

Speaking of making our roads safer, another key element to this legislation is substantially increased fines for dooring. These are aligned with North American standards, and they contribute to significantly reducing collisions. They create awareness as well.

This bill does not just improve the safety for active transportation users; it also does much to reduce collisions and raise awareness between motor vehicles and drivers in many ways. It will also introduce stiffer penalties for impaired driving, both for drivers who have consumed alcohol and those who have taken drugs. It cracks down on distracted drivers and helps to keep those off the road who should not be operating a vehicle for medical reasons. Ultimately, it covers a wide array of factors that infringe upon the safety of all road users in our province.

I encourage all members of this House to support Bill 31. The changes that will come about through its implementation will help improve the lives and safety of every Ontarian across every community. There are far too many injuries and fatalities in our province for us not to act swiftly and appropriately. I believe this bill does both.

I want to say in closing, very quickly, that it was my pleasure and honour to have worked on this particular piece of legislation before I was elected, and I stand here proudly today knowing that we are on the cusp of adopting this critical bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm delighted to rise in the House today to join the discussion on Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act.

Road safety has always been a top priority for our government. The fact that we have been ranked as either first or second for road safety in North America for the past 13 years truly underscores that point.

But even with this great record, we know that there is always more that we can be doing to improve road safety for Ontarians. This is why the Minister of Transportation introduced Bill 31. This legislation is a key piece of a broader package of legislation and regulatory amendments to the Highway Traffic Act, the Provincial Offences Act and the Highway 407 East Act. Bill 31 not only serves to keep drivers on our roads safe but it also introduces a number of very important provisions that will also keep pedestrians and cyclists safe in our province. You just heard the member from Burlington speaking at length about cycle safety.

This package is aimed at tackling many different issues such as impaired driving; distracted driving; medically unfit drivers; truck, vehicle and bus safety; pedestrian safety; cyclist safety; and the collection of unpaid fines. I would like to use some of my time today to highlight a few of the important points in Bill 31.

With the new emerging technologies, distracted driving has become a more relevant and a very complex issue on Ontario roads. Ontario first implemented a distracted driving ban back in 2009. Since the ban was put in place, the province has laid over 300,000 distracted driving charges. That is a shocking number, but people are still not following the law. They're not paying attention. They continue to talk on their phones, and they continue to text. We have made strides through legis-

lation and public education, but changing habits isn't always easy, and we continue to see distracted driving as a problem.

Mr. Speaker, I'll share a quick story with you. In my previous role as a news journalist, I covered many stories on texting and driving and being on the phone while driving. After the legislation first came in, in 2009—it was about six months in—I said to my cameraman, "I'm going to do a story on this, this week, so I want you to head out and collect some videotape, if you can find people on the phone or texting." He said, "What if I don't find anyone?" I said, "Give it an hour or so, and let me know how it goes."

Within half an hour, he came back to my office at the TV station. I said, "Did you forget something?" He said, "No. I'm done. I got lots and lots of videotape." I said, "Really?" He said, "I had no trouble."

He had set up on King Street, just up the street from the TV station in Kitchener. He turned the camera on at an intersection and had about half a dozen people on their phones or texting. He also saw people eating or putting on makeup, and he had some videotape of one gentleman doing a very unpleasant thing with his nose.

Anyway, if the trends continue as they currently are, fatalities from distracted driving could exceed fatalities from drinking and driving by as early as 2016. This is why Bill 31 will impose higher fines, as well as three demerit points on conviction. The increase in penalties will be considerable. The lowest possible fine will be increased by 500%, and the highest penalty by 100%. Distracted driving will also be added to the existing list of novice driver conditions under the graduated licensing system. This will drive home this message to younger drivers.

We realize that these penalties may seem very steep, but we have learned in the past with other dangerous driving behaviour, such as speeding and drunk driving, that stricter penalties do help change driver behaviour and create a kind of social norm that makes distracted driving as socially unacceptable as drunk driving.

According to recent stats, more than 45% of drivers killed on our roads were found to be impaired by drugs or a combination of drugs and alcohol. This is why, with Bill 31, the government is proposing to expand requirements to complete remedial measures and the ignition interlock program for drivers repeatedly caught with a blood-alcohol concentration limit. As of today, these requirements only apply to second and subsequent occurrences in what's called the "warn range."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to let you know that, with Bill 31, the government is proposing dramatic new changes to road safety laws by recognizing drug-impaired driving. This is just as serious as alcohol-impaired driving, and the consequences should reflect that.

Bill 31 and the broader plan to improve Ontario's road safety have been carefully planned with the help of our safety partners. This bill is a great step forward in optimizing road safety for all Ontarians and everyone using our roads: people who are driving, pedestrians and

cyclists. We want to make the roads safer for everyone. I can tell you that, as a parent with three young adults who are driving—they're in their 20s—I'm very concerned about everyone staying safe on the road.

Thank you very much for this time today. I encourage all members of the Legislature to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to begin by thanking our other members who have spoken, to this point, on this issue. When I speak about highways and driving and distracted driving and the like, I always like to begin by thanking MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving. They are a remarkable organization that has been around for a very long time. I would suggest that all of us who have been driving for a long time end up sort of forming our own habits, and habits are difficult to break. Twenty, 30 or 40 years ago, I would say there were people who drove who had a particular habit that was very dangerous, and shifting attitudes and trying to change attitudes is a very difficult thing. I would say that we all owe a debt of gratitude to MADD and their organization, in terms of their ability to impact people's driving habits over the last several decades. So I always like to thank them.

1700

I also want to start by thanking my parliamentary assistant behind me, the member from Burlington. I hope that people who are following this debate on television are acutely aware of the work that she has done on the cycling component, with the organization that she started and that she led for a significant period of time. Individually, she has had a huge impact on cycling safety in the province of Ontario. I know that as being part of her organization that she has left behind, she's very proud of them and the work that collectively they've been able to do and will continue to do in terms of making cycling and sharing the road safer for all of us in the province of Ontario. So I want to thank her for that.

Speaker, I want to speak just briefly—I still have one more member who is going to use some time here—on the penalties piece of what's in this legislation. People who are following the debate will know that Bill 31 has increased penalties included in it. I don't mind saying that sometimes I wonder about that piece, and that piece only. I think when we do include pieces like that, the point is to make it a deterrent to a particular behaviour. I'm not sure that penalties and penalties alone can necessarily prove to be a deterrent. If someone has deep pockets, if they're well-to-do, I'm not sure if a fine is going to be the deterrent that we would want it to be when it comes to driving and bad driving habits, and distracted driving in this particular case.

That's why I think it's important to underline, for people who are interested in this debate, that included in Bill 31, in this legislation, there will be demerit points attached to distracted driving. I think it's three. It's the first time. I think that's a brand new piece. It's not an increase, but a brand new piece. I think about it often

when we talk about penalties. I think that when we're looking at a deterrents package, penalties are one thing, but I think the demerit points that are included that would be withdrawn from the driver are significant. I think that's a very good, very progressive piece in this particular piece of legislation.

A couple of pieces before I wrap up and hand it off to our member from Mississauga—Streetsville: Speaker, you've heard other members say that in Ontario, we have the first- or second-safest roads—I'm not sure if it's in Canada, North America; I always forget the jurisdiction. But it's significant. We do a good job. We always frame these as accidents—and they're accidents in the sense that nobody's doing it on purpose—but they are predictable. We know that there will be accidents, so called. I think, as a result of that, being able to know for sure that we will continue to see serious consequences for families in Ontario—that even though we have highly rated safe infrastructure and highway infrastructure in the province of Ontario, we need to continue to do as much as we can to improve upon what is already a great safety record, relatively. There are still a lot of tragedies out there.

The last piece: I would say, as a member from northern Ontario, we have made massive investments, relative to any government that has come before us, in the highway infrastructure, four-laning, passing lanes, safer infrastructure for northern Ontario drivers than heretofore has ever been the case. It is not even close. Much of that money from the Ministry of Transportation flows through our northern highways program, contained within the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. It's a piece, as northerners, that we are very proud of. Significant pieces of highway that have been four-laned will continue to be four-laned, as a result of our commitment to more infrastructure spending in the province of Ontario. As a northerner, it's a piece that I take great pride in. I'm happy that it will continue.

Speaker, my time is up, and I'm happy to yield the floor to the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have just a few remarks to add to the very thoughtful suggestions and remarks of my colleagues, who have done such an excellent job of covering this bill. Two of them actually relate to some stories.

I can remember the member for Oakville telling me about a particular instance in which the Halton Regional Police had posted a sign saying, "Don't use your cellphone, distracted driver. Police officer ahead." They just basically told people, "Don't do it." If you were not driving distracted, you could see the sign. They were doing a great business hauling distracted drivers over who were blithely driving past an in-your-face sign saying, "Don't talk on your cellphone." They were hauling them over and writing tickets.

Very clearly, there are some people who haven't gotten this message about how lethal distracted driving is. Distracted driving is every bit as lethal and in many cases more so than driving impaired. Many of us in our

baby boom generation will remember when there were no impaired driving regulations, and when they brought them in, such as they were, they were a minor misdeemeanour. My recollection is that, at the time I was growing up in the province of Quebec, the first threshold was either 0.12% or 0.15%, subsequently lowered to 0.1%, 0.08% and I believe it's now 0.05%. But at the time, there wasn't the recognition that this was a problem. Over time, we realized how much of a problem it was.

What alcohol impairment was two generations ago, distracted driving is today, because back then there weren't distractions—distractions, such as it were or might be, would be the person sitting beside you or it would be the radio that you were playing. You didn't have a screen, a video device or a telephone that you could talk on. Today, all of those things are also present in your car and they're competing for your attention inside a car that more effectively seals out sound and more effectively isolates you from the road.

Driving a car today, a machine that is quieter and smoother, makes it a lot easier for you to forget you're driving at, in many cases, two kilometres a minute. As you let your attention drift and your gaze drift, it could very well be lethal. That's the reason that these amendments are being made today. This bill is about saving lives.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, a few comments on the presentations recently presented: We heard earlier this afternoon our transportation critic, the member from Kitchener—Conestoga, outline the work that was done through 30 amendments in an attempt to co-operate with this government, amendments following the spirit of this legislation, amendments with respect to distracted driving that has just been mentioned.

For example, there was a proposed regimen of fines with respect to distracted bicycle riding with respect to cellphone use. According to our critic, there just didn't seem to be any co-operation on that one from the other side.

I do know that Bill 31 requires, for example, all drivers to slow down and move into another lane if they're approaching an emergency vehicle when the blue lights are flashing or the red lights are flashing. In the spirit of that, the opposition brought forward advice through amendments with respect to pulling over or slowing down for snowplows, advice that was rejected and advice that had been presented as required in the form of an amendment.

Amendments were put forward in a similar approach with respect to tow trucks, based on a private member's bill that was debated in this Legislature by MPP Garfield Dunlop. I just think it's unfortunate that the partisanship kicked in. There was an attempt for partnership. This was rejected by the members opposite. I just regret that 30 amendments seem to be rejected out of hand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm pleased to be able to rise and add some comments. I'm looking at the clock and hopefully I'll have an opportunity later to comment in more detail about the bill—to have a second opportunity to speak to it. I got to speak to it in second reading.

Many of the members from the government side have spoken about distracted driving and the increase in fines for distracted drivers. We all know how dangerous it is. Unfortunately, that seems to be not just the youth but we have several adults as well who tend to text and drive, or talk on their phone and drive, or take pictures while they're driving and tweet them out. We all know how unsafe that is.

What I find interesting is that there was a proposal to increase the fines if somebody was to hit a pedestrian and potentially end the life of pedestrian. The government side had voted against that. I think often that's what we see when someone is distracted while driving: Not only are there motor vehicle accidents that could potentially be fatal, but it's often people that are crossing the road, could even be on the sidewalk, walking, and a vehicle goes off the road and up the sidewalk and hits a pedestrian. So I think there needs to be consideration to increasing fines when somebody is not only distracted while driving—maybe they choose not to stop at a crosswalk when a pedestrian is trying to cross. I think we need to look at a stiffer penalty for people who harm somebody, harm a pedestrian or potentially end their life, because they either choose not to stop or they're too busy talking on their phone or reaching for something from the seat beside them and not paying attention to the road.

1710

So I would ask that among many other amendments which I hope we have the opportunity to speak to, that we brought forward and were voted against by the government side—I would hope that when they're talking about distracted driving, that is an amendment they would take into consideration.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak for two minutes on Bill 31. First of all, I wanted to support what the member from Kitchener Centre was saying about distracted driving. There's not one time that I am being driven to Pearson airport that I don't see at least—at least—five people speaking on the phone, texting, putting their makeup on. Imagine, they're not driving at 20 kilometres an hour. I would like to be able to take their licence plate. I hope that there is nobody in this House who does that—I hope not—that we are all very cautious. But what I'm glad to see is that, in the same vein, we are adding a distracted driving prohibition to the existing novice driver's licence conditions under the graduated licensing system, to the regulations. You see youth doing that because, of course, when you are young you're not going to have an accident, you're not going to be injured and you're not going to die from a car accident. But it's not only the youth, because those that I see are people of your age or

my age. It's very dangerous, not only for them but for those around them.

One more issue that I'm very pleased about—and it has come to my attention from residents in my riding—is pedestrian safety. It requires drivers to yield the whole roadway to pedestrians at school crossings—not just at school crossings, but at pedestrian crossings. That's what I hear. Representing the downtown, people don't—they just wait at the red light to turn right and it's very dangerous for the pedestrians. I'm glad to see that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to begin my time with thanks to the member from Cambridge for getting that note across to me. I think that is something that needs to be understood, and certainly I, personally, would like to understand that. I used to do that for a living. So I just wanted to understand why we're changing lengths for B-trains.

Speaker, as I said, I used to be a trucker. I did that for quite a few years. I was very disappointed when the member from Kitchener-Conestoga suggested putting legislation in for training for roundabouts. I want to tell you about the first time I went around a roundabout with a truck. When they were sending me over to that part just south of Elmira, all the company told me was to be careful of the roundabout. I had never been through one with a truck. This truck I was driving was about 80 feet long. I approached the intersection and saw a bunch of traffic in there. If you're driving a truck, you always have to be over to the one side; if you're going left you have to allow some room. Fortunately, the truck was big enough and maybe imposing enough that the cars let me go, because the truck took up the whole thing, and I had to go three quarters of the way around to get out of it. So cars couldn't go anywhere when I was in there. Maybe that was a good thing, because it was a little difficult, a little scary when I first went around there, because I had never been through one with a big truck. That's maybe something that should be taught in driver training, not only with young folks who are starting off driving cars but with truck drivers. There should be some kind of a system where they take you around those things. Also size-wise, the roundabout should maybe have been a little bit bigger because the back wheels of my trailer were actually up on the curb on the left-hand side, in the grass, as I was going around, and I was as far as I could be on the right-hand side.

I think there are some issues with roundabouts. It's unfortunate that this government wouldn't listen to us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the government members can now reply.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I want to begin by thanking the members of this House for their contributions in this conversation today. In particular, I want to thank my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry for his very kind comments about my cycling advocacy, which was a tremendous pleasure, the members for Kitchener Centre and Mississauga-Streetsville, and the

Attorney General—so much talk about cycling today, Speaker. It's been very heartening.

The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry mentioned the northern highways program, and I'm so glad he did because I was unaware of the extent of our investments in northern Ontario. Sometimes it takes our northern colleagues to remind us of the importance of that, and it really is so important.

In the history of this province too, though, I think it's worth noting that there's never been a more significant modernization of the Highway Traffic Act from a cycling perspective, and we're about to do that. I think that's critically important and worth noting. I'm proud of that, and I know that this pride is shared by members on all sides of this House. I certainly heard that reflected today.

Given the time of year it is with the nice weather here, cyclists from across our province—even on the roads in your riding, if I may say, Speaker, which is contiguous to my own, cyclists enjoy the Halton Hills. It's a beautiful place to ride. They will now begin to have greater confidence, with 600,000 cyclists riding their bikes on average every day in our province and 132,000 of them in Toronto alone.

If I may close on a personal note, Speaker: On June 6—this year, nine years ago—I lost my husband in a cycling collision, as many members of this House know. This year, we will re-mark that time with special reverence, as we always do, and in laughter and in celebration of the life he had and the person he was, but we will also reflect on the work that's been accomplished on cycling in the past five or six years in particular. I'll be able to count this legislation as part of that record of service from members of this House to our province to make cycling safer. If this legislation had been passed, Greg might be alive today. There are provisions within it that are long overdue.

Speaker, thank you for permitting me to close on a personal note and to thank the members of this House for the significant debate that this bill has had. It's a very important piece of work, and I'm proud to be here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 31, An Act to amend the Highway 407 East Act, 2012 and the Highway Traffic Act in respect of various matters and to make a consequential amendment to the Provincial Offences Act.

The member from Burlington was just speaking, so I feel I should respond in that this bill does contain quite a few bicycling—cycling—provisions which I look forward to bringing up as it's debated.

I think I had a private member's bill to do with paved shoulders three times. The member from Burlington, in her role at that time with the Share the Road Cycling Coalition, was very supportive and helpful. As she just mentioned, her passed husband was an OPP officer. We have a similarity in that my spouse is an OPP officer as well. I remember, in doing that private member's bill several times, that the member from Burlington, as the

Share the Road Cycling Coalition—she played a big role in press conferences etc. and supported the private member's bill, and I thank her for that.

I guess we'll start with some of the details of Bill 31. Perhaps we'll start with the impaired driving section. I note that the bill will expand the scope by which a person can have their licence suspended or car impounded to include non-compliance with remedial programs, such as the ignition interlock program. I think that's a positive thing.

I have had, I think, in my riding, a strange scenario where a person was charged with impaired driving, but the only vehicle they had was a motorcycle. So I guess my question is, can an interlock device be hooked up on a motorcycle? If not, then what other sort of provision can be made for that scenario where the person might be very dependent upon that? Just a question for the government on that.

1720

Of course we have all kinds of rules to do with impaired driving, but the bill also brings in rules to do with impaired driving from drugs. The bill adds two new sections that mirror sections 48 and 48.3 where a person is driving a motor vehicle or operating a vessel while impaired by a drug or by a combination of a drug and alcohol. I guess the challenge will be, certainly, how you determine if someone is impaired by a drug, and I'm sure that will come up in courts etc., but I note that they talk about someone trained as a drug recognition expert to be able to determine that. Representing an area that has a lot of boating in it, and lakes and, of course, beautiful Georgian Bay, the bill also deals with vessels as well.

Moving on to a section to do with bicycling: There are quite a few different aspects or details on that. First of all, of course, it had been illegal to actually ride on the paved shoulder of a highway. As I mentioned, I twice debated a private member's bill so that when a secondary designated provincial highway is being rebuilt, a minimum one-metre paved shoulder would be added to that highway. The benefit that I see in doing that is, as was mentioned by the member from Burlington, one of the main reasons that people don't cycle is that they're worried for their safety, so if you provide more safe places to cycle, then people will be inclined to do it. So you get the benefits of more people riding—a healthier population—and obviously safety for both the cyclist and the automobiles and/or truck drivers.

With a paved shoulder in the wintertime, for example, when you don't actually see where the shoulder is, you don't drop onto the gravel, and then correct and lose control of the vehicle. Or, on a secondary road, if you have two trucks that are meeting, there's often just nowhere to go, so if there's a paved shoulder there is a safe place for a cyclist. Of course, there are lower maintenance costs as well—so I've been arguing for paved shoulders.

As well, there are tourism benefits. The area I represent is Parry Sound–Muskoka, an ideal place for cycling, with the lakes and beautiful vistas etc. With

more paved shoulders, we will have more people who—it may not be the only thing they do when they come to Parry Sound–Muskoka. They might go fishing, they might golf, but also there are a lot of people who would add cycling to the mix of activities that they would do. That's part of the reason I've been so supportive of paved shoulders. What this particular bill does is, it just makes it so it's not illegal to ride on certain paved shoulders.

It also does some small things: It allows bicycles to have a flashing red light on the rear—that seems like a no-brainer to me; obviously as much visibility as you can get, as possible, is preferred. It allows that traffic control signals that are specific to bicyclists would be allowed. We're starting to see that in the city itself now. The bill does away with the prohibition against riding or operating a bicycle along a crosswalk. The bill would require the driver of a motor vehicle passing a bicycle to maintain a distance of at least one metre between the vehicle and the bicycle—certainly that's a good idea; I do wonder a bit about how that will be enforced. It seems to me that that's going to be difficult to enforce. The bill allows a bicycle lane to go in the opposite direction on a one-way street, and section 156 of the act is amended to permit bicycles to be ridden or operated on the paved shoulder of a highway that is divided into two separate roadways. It seeks to prevent dooring and increases the fines significantly for dooring—so, quite a few different aspects to cycling.

I'm a member now, with the member from Burlington and the member from Brampton, Mr. Singh, of the all-party cycling caucus. I'm happy to say that we had our first meeting and invited quite a few members and had a really good presentation from Marlaine Koehler, who is with the Waterfront Regeneration Trust and has been doing tremendous work around the province, trying to make more cycling routes. It's pretty impressive to see what is already there, and more in the works.

One of the dotted lines in her presentation that I'm particularly interested in is an around-Georgian-Bay loop, so you'd be able to cycle completely around Georgian Bay, with side trips into places like Killarney, which is absolutely spectacular.

But there are some challenges right now. Part of the reason I have an order paper question in to the Ministry of Transportation, to do with the four-laning of Highway 400 from Parry Sound north to Sudbury, is that in the original design, I think it actually cuts off areas to cycle, and there is just no other alternative to cycle. It hasn't been built yet, so I hope that the government works into their design the provisions that there will be some route for cycling—obviously, not on Highway 400—in that design, before the remaining section of Highway 400 is actually done. That is something that I absolutely hope gets done. Then that will be a wonderful cycling route when it is eventually finished, right around Georgian Bay. I'm sure there will be great views out over what is one of the natural wonders of the world.

They are also working on the Trans-Canada Highway, because a lot of people do cycle across the whole

country, and cycling on Highway 17, with the traffic etc., is worth your life at this point. It's very dangerous. But the fact is that a lot of people do cycle across the country.

Marlaine pointed out that they're working to get—I believe it was roughly 350 kilometres where currently, right now, you have to cycle on Highway 17, and they've got it down to something like 40 kilometres. I wish her well in that work and hope that the government and MTO assist in that regard.

I presented a petition today, actually, to do with paved shoulders, which came to me from the Parry Sound–North Bay health unit. Also, people were signing it at Parry Sound Bikes and at some of the municipal offices. That was a petition, when the construction is being done on Highway 124—which joins Parry Sound to Sundridge—to pave the shoulders of that highway. It does have sections that are done right now, but there are some gaps in that highway.

Also, another one that I've spoken of before is Highway 559, which connects Killbear Provincial Park, which is one of the most beautiful provincial parks in the province—it has spectacular beaches, and it's about 30 kilometres from Parry Sound, so it's a reasonable cycling distance. There are about 5,000 people in that provincial park in the summertime. Right now, they have to ride along Highway 559, and there are no paved shoulders, so obviously, there is a risk there. I am hopeful that when that highway is rebuilt, they will rebuild it with paved shoulders. It's a bit involved because, just with the nature of the highway, it looks like it's going to need some fairly major construction when it is rebuilt. But it would be a natural, because it would connect into the Nobel area, which does have paved shoulders.

I know that McDougall and Parry Sound are right now working on getting the last couple of kilometres right into Parry Sound. The active transportation committee is actively working to try to get paved shoulders and a separate pathway from Parry Sound out to the baseball diamonds—which lots of people ride. That connects to Nobel, which has very good infrastructure right up to Highway 559. I'm certainly very supportive of that.

1730

I'm also supportive of trying to get more safe cycling routes to schools. I know that when the new Almaguin high school was being built between South River and Sundridge, some of the local councillors came to me to make sure there would be safe cycling routes to it because it's not right in a town. Obviously, it's a great way to encourage young people to get daily physical exercise.

It was actually Elgin Schneider, who was the long-time mayor of Sundridge—I remember him mentioning it to me. I just happened to be at an event last weekend recognizing Elgin because Elgin had been elected for 44 years, 34 of those as mayor. I was at the event with lots of municipal people and lots of people there to thank Elgin for his many years of service and all the countless evenings out and meetings etc. I said at the meeting that I have been elected for 14 years, so I only have 30 more to

serve to match Elgin's record, except I think I'm going to need a walker to get in this place if I actually do try to achieve that record. I don't think there's any danger; I think his record is safe. Certainly Elgin and Myrna are great people from Sundridge. He did a lot of wonderful work.

As was noted by our critic when he spoke, there were some 30 amendments to this bill from the opposition that were put forward and none of them were passed. I'm disappointed by that because I think there were some very worthwhile amendments. I will go through some of them.

I guess we'll start with my own private member's bill. I have a private member's bill, number 58. I believe that there was an amendment put forward by our critic that would have incorporated that into this legislation. Bill 58 essentially updates the rules for ATVs to allow, where they are allowed to be driven on roads—certain provincial highways, secondary highways or municipalities decide if they do or do not want ATVs on the roads, and which particular roads. My bill would amend the rules so that where ATVs are allowed, some of the newly designed vehicles that weren't around 10 years ago would also be allowed. They are commonly called UTVs, utility task vehicles, or ORVs, off-road vehicles, or two-ups, or side-by-sides. These are the various names used for them. So I was disappointed, obviously. That was an amendment put forward.

The government looks like they're moving on this because they just finished a survey, and people could give input on the possibility of changing the rules to do with ORVs, so I am hopeful that they are actually moving forward on this, and I hope that it actually comes to happen.

I'll get back to the amendments in a second because I can see I'm running out of time.

Another part of the bill that I'm quite happy about is that the member from Simcoe North, Garfield Dunlop—his "slow down, move over" bill that he had put forward has been incorporated into Bill 31. Just as we now have rules—if you see an OPP vehicle on the side of the highway and its flashing lights are on, then you are to slow down and move over to the lane to provide some breathing space around the vehicle, which I think makes a lot of sense just because it's a really dangerous spot to be getting out of a vehicle. This bill will make the rules apply for emergency vehicles and tow truck drivers because the tow truck drivers are out there all the time, and they've got a really dangerous job. That is a very, very dangerous spot to be getting out of your vehicle. This legislation would require that you pull over to the left lane and give some space around the tow truck. A lot of operators are killed each year around the world, and this will make it a safer place for them, so I'm pleased to see that.

There are, of course, bigger fines for distracted driving. There is some question—I heard one of the government members talking about how they are intending on also attaching demerit points. That's one of the things

that we've been critical about, that they haven't just put demerit points right in the bill. In fact, I believe we had an amendment to do with that as well that would have incorporated demerit points right into the bill. It's something we would like to see.

There's a section on crosswalks as well, trying to make it safer for crosswalks. I think we should be talking about not only distracted driving but distracted walking, because I walk in to Queen's Park every morning—a 20-minute walk here—and I'm amazed how many people will be either listening to music or texting as they walk, looking down and not even looking at the road as they cross the road. They don't assume any responsibility for their own safety and just assume that whatever vehicles, whether they be bicycles or cars or whatever, are going to absolutely see them. People don't always see them, so they should not be making that assumption. I think maybe education on that to make people more aware of it—so when you come to cross the road, you should be looking in all directions and being careful.

When you're over in England—it's very different in London, England, for example, where they have far more people and vehicles and it's really busy. When you go to step onto the road, you'll see down—of course, they're driving on the opposite side. It will say, "Look right," or, "Look left." When you're not used to looking that way, you look, and the cars do not even slow down. If you step on the road, it's not a good thing. I simply think that here in Ontario maybe educating people about not texting while they're crossing at a crosswalk or at an intersection would be a good thing.

I know we have some concerns with medical reviews. I think just about everyone has had situations in their constituency offices where someone loses their licence, sometimes because it's a mistake—not always. But the length of time to get your licence back is just way too long. That's something that is dealt with in this bill a bit, but timeliness is not necessarily addressed.

Some of the other amendments that we had—and I'm down to my last few seconds—our critic had rules to do with roundabouts. We have a few roundabouts in Parry Sound–Muskoka, and it is true that drivers are often not familiar with roundabouts, particularly when they're first built in Ontario, and the rules are unclear for people. We probably should have both education and some standardized rules to do with roundabouts.

Mr. Speaker, I can see I'm out of time, so I will end there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to follow the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. Of course, he has done his own groundbreaking work that is, in part, incorporated into this on fighting for paved shoulders so cyclists can travel between jurisdictions. That's really important and should be acknowledged. I'm very happy to see that in this bill—and also, of course, my one-metre rule bill that has been incorporated as well. We hoped that the language would be a little stricter. The wiggle

phrase “as may be practicable” is a little concerning, but, hey, it’s there. So that’s important as well.

I just wanted to reiterate—and I’ve had some conversations with the member from Burlington about this—about mandatory sideguards for trucks. We had a death in our community, Tom Samson, and I just want to say his name. He was a grade 2 teacher at Swansea Public School who died on his bike. Really, his death influenced the entire riding—very, very sad.

Again, anything we can do, because, as we all know, that is the major reason that people do not ride their bikes in the city of Toronto: safety concerns. Those concerns are valid. They’re valid. Because until we have really separated bike tracks allowing you to get everywhere, that concern is going to be real. So everything we can do, and anything we can do, provincially is absolutely essential.

Because I didn’t have a chance, I just want to, again, say thanks to the member from Burlington for her work with Share the Road, and also condolences. We share a sad reality. Both of our husbands—the father of my children—died in traffic accidents many, many years ago. I know what that’s like. I just want her to know that all of our prayers and our love are with her.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: It’s my pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this bill and to speak to the interventions by both my colleagues from Parkdale–High Park and from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I do want to pick up a little bit on some of the comments from my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka when he was talking about paved shoulders and many other instances to make our highways safer. I, like I think hundreds of thousands of other Ontarians, am a huge motorcycle enthusiast. Right now, I’ve been busy polishing my motorcycle, getting ready to start doing a lot of the tours, most likely into the riding of my colleague in Parry Sound–Muskoka and then back up to Sudbury.

One of the things as an enthusiast of riding a motorcycle is, you have to be very cognitive of the road and others on the road. For me, the importance of the new pieces of this legislation that are coming into distracted driving are so critical. As a motorcycle enthusiast, we have to be so cognitive of others on the road. To see individuals that are still utilizing their cellphone or whatever smartphone while driving is concerning.

I’m actually very pleased to see how we’re increasing the fines for distracted driving. I think that is something that’s truly critical to really move this point forward to start making our roads safer. I know we’ve done some great work over the last few years when it comes to that, and the provisions, I think, are really going to start sending a clear message that it is so important for all road users to ensure that we’re on the road being safe and cognitive of what’s going on around us. At the same time, we need to learn to share the road.

With that, I’d like to thank my honourable colleagues for their interventions earlier. I’m glad I was able to participate in this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I’m pleased to join in the debate. I want to thank the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka for his comments. He has been a great advocate. I know he has done so well with his first bill that talked about paved shoulders and cycling. I just wish the government would have included the aspect of designated provincial highways that was in his original bill. They didn’t put that in this.

But I do have one complaint, and I’ve levied it to the member. He knows my complaint. We have a great cycling community in my riding of Leeds–Grenville. In fact, we have a beautiful waterfront trail along the Thousand Islands Parkway that the St. Lawrence Parks Commission was involved in. So to him and to the member for Burlington and the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton, I don’t know why I wasn’t included in the bike caucus, but on behalf of cyclists all across Leeds–Grenville, I want to put the request in that whatever list I was left off of, I want to be put on.

Mr. Norm Miller: You’re blacklisted.

Mr. Steve Clark: I don’t know about that. I wouldn’t go that far, Mr. Miller.

Anyway, I wanted to put that on the record. I also wanted to put on the record my support for the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka’s Bill 58. Today, I had a petition from all across the province. People picked it up from my website. It’s not an electronic petition, I want to tell the table. It’s a petition that conforms to the standing orders. I hope we will be able to put electronic petitions in at some point.

Bill 58, which deals with UTVs and ATVs, is just a huge issue in rural Ontario. I really wish that the government would have included that in this bill. At the very least, they should announce, as part of the budget, that they’re going to change that regulation that’s so out of date and doesn’t keep up with what happens in rural Ontario right now.

I want to thank the member for his comments today on Bill 31. I want to applaud him for his private member’s bill, Bill 58, and I just want to take this opportunity to thank you for allowing me that two minutes, plus, plus, plus. Thanks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It’s my pleasure to get to rise again to speak to this bill. The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has touched on many aspects of the bill, some of the good points and some things that are lacking in the bill. He talked about roundabouts. In my riding of Windsor West, and across all of Windsor and Essex county, they’re starting to introduce roundabouts.

Something that I found interesting when my husband and I had the opportunity to vacation in Europe: We noticed that in many of the cities it’s very congested. The

traffic moves very quickly, but it's very close together. They often have scooters in amongst them, but they know how to navigate the roundabouts and know how to use them fairly safely. I'm sure they do have their share of accidents, but they do use them fairly safely. We're seeing more and more of them introduced across Ontario, and there's not necessarily the education for those motorists that use the roundabouts on exactly how they work. Often you'll see people come to a complete stop, when it's a yield, to get into the roundabouts. I think there definitely needs to be some education around that because they're a valuable tool in helping traffic move along.

Something else he had talked about, which I kind of chuckled at when he brought it up, was distracted walking, which is not in the bill, but several times I have joked, walking down the halls here at Queen's Park back to my office and I'm on my phone and someone else is coming the other way and we almost bump into each other. I say, "You know, really, there should be a law about distracted walking." So I found that kind of funny.

It's funny in here, but it's not funny outside, though, when people are out looking to cross the street at a crosswalk and they're not paying attention as they step out into traffic. I think that just reiterates the importance of increased fines not only for distracted driving, but should someone be driving and hit a pedestrian in the crosswalk, we need to look at increased fines for that.

I think that's just about my time, Speaker. Hopefully I'll get to speak to it further.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments.

We go back to the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka for his reply.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the members from Leeds–Grenville, Sudbury, Windsor West and Parkdale–High Park, who all had comments.

To the member from Leeds–Grenville: The next bike caucus meeting is May 27. It's a morning breakfast meeting. So, please, I'm sure you're invited to come, despite all the blacklists that you're actually on. The Thousand Islands is a beautiful area, almost but not quite as nice as the 30,000 Islands region of Parry Sound–Muskoka in Georgian Bay.

The member from Sudbury was talking about motorcycling and distracted drivers. I did motorcycle until a couple of years ago and found in this job that I never got time to use it, so I sold it. But at least on one occasion, I was riding along on a secondary highway and a car just started coming straight at me all of a sudden. I don't know whether it was because they were texting or somehow distracted or whatever, but it is a scary thing, on a motorcycle, when that happens because you don't get much time to react—or any—so he makes a good point. One good place he could ride, of course, on his motorcycle would be to Killarney for fish and chips, which I think is a very popular spot. A lot of people from Parry Sound ride up there or they fly in, if they happen to have an airplane; it's a popular place to fly to as well.

Of course, I thank the member from Leeds–Grenville for his comments about Bill 58 and his support.

Roundabouts, as was mentioned by the member from Windsor West, certainly seem to be getting more common. We have a few in Parry Sound–Muskoka. I think there are few enough that people just don't know how to handle roundabouts, so we probably do need rules to deal with them. I think that pedestrians should be kept out of roundabouts—that's my personal feeling—and maybe cross just up the road from them, as they do in England. Thank you for the time to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. I did notice you check the clock before I started. I'm cognizant of the time. I did prepare for 20 minutes, so we'll see how much I get through.

It always gives me great pleasure to rise in the chamber on behalf of the people of my riding of Windsor West. Today I'm here again to speak to Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act. I had the opportunity to speak to this bill at second reading and, from what I understand, this bill hasn't had much change since. The bill hasn't changed despite several excellent amendments put forward by New Democrats that would help strengthen this bill. In fact, the Liberals voted against every single amendment put forward by the NDP at committee—every single one. One of our main concerns is that this bill empowers the government to outsource motor vehicle inspection centres to an unspecified third party that would be exempt from the oversight of the Auditor General and the Ombudsman.

A number of my colleagues compared this to the creation of Drive Clean on steroids. I think that's a correct depiction. This unaccountable delegated authority could have the power to tell drivers how often they must bring their vehicles in for inspection and what they need to do to pass inspection. I don't think it's too much to ask that this government clarify the vague provisions that allow for this outsourcing.

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This is why New Democrats tabled amendments at committee that would improve transparency around this issue. We asked for some accountability mechanisms, be it the Auditor General or the Ombudsman; the Liberals voted this down.

We offered an amendment that would ensure that the director of vehicle inspection standards must be an officer of the ministry—a public servant, for instance. Again, the Liberals voted this down. Currently, under this legislation, the director could be anyone, including someone chosen by special interests such as insurance companies. It could even be another Liberal patronage appointment, which so many Ontarians are growing tired of.

I think you'll soon find a theme in my speech today, Speaker. Another amendment that the New Democrats tabled would require motorists to stop at an unsignalled crosswalk if there was a pedestrian waiting to cross. I

think people across Ontario would be shocked to learn that this isn't already a law. As I understand it, once you step off the sidewalk and onto a crosswalk, motorists have to stop for you and allow you to cross. Of course, this is obvious. What we would like is for this level of protection to be extended to pedestrians waiting at crosswalks.

The NDP proposed an amendment that would match the law with people's expectations of the law. How do you know when it is appropriate to step off the sidewalk and onto a crosswalk if there is nothing prompting you? Are children able to measure traffic effectively and know when it's safe to enter a crosswalk? Wouldn't a requirement that all motorists stop at a crosswalk where a pedestrian is waiting greatly improve public safety?

New Democrats also sought to increase the maximum fine for hitting a pedestrian when they are in a crosswalk. Currently the fine is \$500, even in instances where the pedestrian is killed. We proposed that the maximum fine be increased to \$1,000, just as the maximum fine for distracted driving is being increased. The Liberals voted against this.

Again we have an instance where New Democrats were looking to improve this bill and add to the discussion on safety. In a bill that seeks an increase in fines for illegal activity like distracted driving, we simply added to the list and proposed an increase in the fine one faces when one hits a pedestrian in a crosswalk, but, like with all of the meaningful amendments we put forward, the Liberals were more interested in playing politics than truly improving the bill.

I'd like to go back to the point about unsignalled crosswalks and talk about that for a moment, if I have the opportunity. The argument for voting against the amendment that we had proposed, the Liberals' argument against the amendment, was that someone might point at something while near a crosswalk, and then a car would have to stop for nothing. I would say that pedestrian safety—someone's life—is certainly more important than someone in a vehicle having to stop for a minute or two to assess a situation and know whether or not it's safe for them to continue on their way.

Also, we spoke briefly about mandatory sideguards for large trucks, to save cyclists' lives. This has long been a recommendation of the Ontario coroner, and truck sideguards are mandatory in both Europe and Japan. The government members of the committee voted against this, even the member from the government side who was the former ED of Share the Road, which had endorsed truck sideguards, along with all other recommendations of the Ontario coroner following the report on cycling deaths.

Another issue I'd like to highlight is that the current form of this bill still allows the operators of Highway 407 East to use the same ruthless collection tactics as the operators of the 407 ETR, which is not surprising, since they are mainly the same people. New Democrats proposed that the bill keep the notification requirements for the 407 East act, but again, this was voted down.

I think it's worth paying attention to this provision. As a member of the opposition, I'm skeptical any time the government removes a provision mandating public consultation. I think this is something Ontarians want to see more of, especially when it comes to user fees.

I'm speaking from experience here. I receive letters every week about the bridge fees at the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, which the bridge company is allowed to increase without consultation. It's important to point out that this is a privately owned bridge, and my understanding is that even though those who utilize the bridge already have concerns about the toll, the fee is set to rise again. I'm certainly looking forward to a new publicly owned bridge where Ontarians have a say in what the fees would be.

While I'm on this topic: When the Highway 407 East Act came into force in 2012, New Democrats demanded amendments that required the registrar of motor vehicles to notify drivers via registered mail or bonded courier that their plate renewal was about to be denied because of unpaid 407 ETR fees. Bill 31 removes this notification. Again, I must ask: Why? What is the point of doing this?

I'm sure my colleagues on the other side of the floor remember that the 407 ETR admitted to practising bill suppression. It admitted to a practice of ceasing to mail bills after three months, only to track down a driver years later with a whopping bill complete with compound interest. If anything, this demonstrates the need for this notification.

This bill also makes a number of changes to the Provincial Offences Act, including changes that allow the province to deny licence plate issuances or renewals to people with parking infractions, photo radar system violations and red light camera system violations, just to name a few.

I think I would agree that municipalities need more tools in collecting unpaid fines and that the province needs to work with municipalities to make this collection possible. This portion of the bill, I will admit, is a good first step in streamlining the collection process and giving municipalities more clarity. However, it can be improved upon.

I was fortunate enough to participate in AMO this past summer, and this was a major issue for many municipalities across Ontario. I do hope we can work to properly address uncollected POA fines in the coming months. At AMO, I learned that, currently, whenever money from the POA is collected, a portion of it is paid to the province but the remainder stays with the municipality. The estimated amount owed to municipalities in uncollected POA fines is estimated at up to \$1 billion. Some more drastic examples of money owing include cities like Sault Ste. Marie, which has lost up to \$12 million. Speaker, I'm sure you know that \$12 million is a great deal of money for a municipality. That's money they could put into infrastructure.

Municipalities have complained that the 407 Express Toll Route has more power to collect fines than municipalities. This is something I heard at AMO this summer. This was also one of their top asks as far back as 2011.

I'm glad that this government is finally taking steps to address these issues. We've seen other examples of action on this file in 1999, 2002 and 2010. I hope that we will continue to see work on this file to better coordinate fine collection with the provincial government and align the authority of municipalities with their actual responsibilities.

Speaker, it looks like I'm going to come in just under the wire. I enjoyed my time speaking to Bill 31 today. I would very much have liked to speak to an improved

version of this bill, and I think I would have if this government would have passed at least one of our amendments at committee. Unfortunately, this didn't happen, and as a result, there are still a number of ways to improve this bill and the safety of Ontarians.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiane (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
		Premier / Première ministre
		Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
Laurie Scott, Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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First Session, 41st Parliament

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 21 April 2015

Mardi 21 avril 2015



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 21 April 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 21 avril 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SMART GROWTH FOR OUR COMMUNITIES ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 POUR UNE CROISSANCE INTELLIGENTE DE NOS COLLECTIVITÉS

Mr. McMeekin moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 73, An Act to amend the Development Charges Act, 1997 and the Planning Act / Projet de loi 73, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur les redevances d'aménagement et la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant—the member from Northumberland—Quinte West—and the member from Scarborough—Agincourt. What a team, I'll tell you. Before I turn the floor over to my parliamentary assistant and the member from Scarborough—Agincourt, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the proposed Smart Growth for Our Communities Act, known as Bill 73.

Bill 73, if passed, would better ensure that as Ontario communities grow we are smart about managing that growth. To manage growth, we had to put the pieces together and build the framework—which reminds me, Speaker, that when my daughters were young we would spend many hours together at the summer cottage putting together a jigsaw puzzle. As a prank, one of my girls would often hide one of the pieces, giggling as Dad searched frantically around the house for that part that would finally complete our masterpiece. They would all deny they snatched the piece and then Dad would find it on the floor under the puzzle, and the work would be done. Obviously we couldn't get very far without all the pieces. But then, having decided as a family on our puzzle strategy, we'd start another puzzle by establishing the outside frame. Then we would fill it in towards the middle. In many ways that's a great analogy to describe what we're doing for land use planning here in Ontario.

It started with a landmark piece of legislation, the Greenbelt Act—the largest greenbelt in the world, Mr. Speaker. The Greenbelt Act went far beyond any previous effort to protect environmentally sensitive lands. It

signalled our government's desire to change the way we think about growth in Ontario. The greenbelt isn't just about protecting green spaces, as important as that is; it's also about creating a vision for the way Ontario's cities and towns realize their full potential. Well-planned communities offer citizens a high quality of life, opportunities for a healthy lifestyle and a great place to live, work, and raise a family. They attract industry and innovation and create jobs, all the while preserving our green spaces and protecting our agricultural sector.

Speaker, we want to grow Ontario communities in a way that curbs sprawl and creates vibrant urban centres. With the creation of the greenbelt we started building the outside frame of a very complex puzzle. That frame contains other pieces as well. We issued a provincial policy statement to guide municipalities in their planning process, one which, by the way, was really preferential to the agricultural community and some of the subsidiary uses of agricultural lands. Last year, we provided a clear, province-wide policy direction, in fact, through that 2014 provincial policy statement.

These policies help to promote strong communities, a strong economy and a healthy environment. In February, Minister Mauro and I launched a review of the four provincial land use plans, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Niagara Escarpment Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Greenbelt Plan. We were fortunate enough to have the Honourable David Crombie agree to lead that plan, which was really fortunate for us. He's a good person.

Bill 73, if passed, would be another important piece of our puzzle. It would help Ontario communities grow and thrive. During the consultation period for this legislation, we heard many perspectives. People told us about planning rules that are sometimes too complex and costly delays in appeals processes. Many were frustrated that more disagreements couldn't be resolved at the local level.

Speaker, Ontarians told us we needed to make thoughtful changes that promote accountability and sustainability. And that's what we did: changes to give the public greater say in just how their neighbourhoods will grow. That's why we're setting out clearer rules for land use planning. We are wanting municipalities to become more independent in making local decisions, including resolving disputes.

Some of our cities and towns are growing very rapidly. They've got booming populations and record levels of development. That also means more demands are being made on existing infrastructure, housing, highways,

water and transit. But with change comes opportunity. I remember my mom saying to me growing up, "Teddy, what's a giant obstacle except a brilliant opportunity cleverly disguised?"

By creating the outer frame of our puzzle, we can ensure a higher quality of life now and for future generations. That means planning for more compact growth, and a more efficient and innovative use of infrastructure. That in turn creates jobs and helps build more vital and vibrant communities.

Bill 73 lays the foundation for how we start to fill in the inside pieces of our complex puzzle.

Interruption.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Bless you, before the devil gets up your nose. Wasn't that what you said the other day?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Yes, that's the devil.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: That would give Ontarians a greater voice in how their communities grow, a substantive voice; for example, by including citizen representatives in municipal planning advisory committees.

Bill 73, if passed, would allow for more continuity and predictability and—dare I say it?—stability in our planning system. The proposed reforms would encourage an innovative way to plan and address local needs, involving community members in the process. Once established by a municipality, the community planning permit system would not be subject to any appeals of private applications for a period of five years. That means municipalities will be the only ones able to amend their plans during this timeout period.

0910

Bill 73 would also make the planning and appeals process more predictable by increasing the number of matters that get determined locally. We would do this by providing an option for an additional 90 days to resolve issues involving official plans and amendments. Municipalities would be allowed more time to engage in alternative dispute resolution. The ability to appeal some items would be removed. These measures would reduce the number of issues that make their way to the Ontario Municipal Board.

Now, I know there are questions about the Ontario Municipal Board itself and whether we're planning to change its role. It's another important piece of our puzzle. The Ontario Municipal Board's operations, practices and procedures were not part of this first-stage review. To really complete our puzzle, however, I will work with my colleague the Attorney General in a review of the OMB's scope and effectiveness. In the end, Speaker, we all want to see planning disputes resolved, wherever possible, locally.

We're also going to be proposing changes to the Development Charges Act and address the costs of development. Increasing accountability and transparency in the development charges system is another big piece of our puzzle. We've had stakeholders right across the province indicate a desire for that. We would create more transparent reporting requirements for municipalities collecting money under section 37 of the Planning Act related to

density bonusing and related to parkland dedications, which would detail how funds are spent. Development charges would be payable at the time the building permit was issued so the developers and homeowners would now be more certain of the costs.

Growth is vital, but we also understand the importance of well-located parkland and green spaces. The greenbelt simply shouldn't circle cities; it should run through cities as well. Our proposed changes would require more municipalities to put in place a parks plan to inform where resources are in fact directed. The plan would involve input from school boards and would be another opportunity for residents to have their say in how their communities grow. At the same time, the proposed changes would help communities recover capital costs—funds that were spent on important infrastructure like transit projects and waste diversion. Municipalities need to be able to plan ahead for their growing needs, particularly for much-needed transit priorities.

Speaking of infrastructure, the last piece of our puzzle, and perhaps the most important piece, involves the discussion around affordable housing. I've always believed that a truly complete land use planning picture—the whole puzzle—must include affordable housing. Last week, we kicked off a public consultation to update our historic Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. We all need to understand that planning and housing are linked, and that we can't complete this puzzle without making sure we have a healthy supply of affordable housing in Ontario.

We will look at the whole puzzle—every single piece—and create a complete picture of how Ontario will grow. All Ontarians need accessible, transparent and responsive tools to manage and pay for growth. All Ontarians should be able to count on a planning system that is predictable. All Ontarians should have a say on what is built in their neighbourhoods. This proposed legislation responds to the real and evolving needs of our Ontario citizens. I'm confident this piece of legislation is vital to complete the complex puzzle of land use planning in Ontario.

Getting it right means building strong communities across Ontario. We have more work to do, obviously, and we're going to keep at it. But I urge all members to vote for the passing of this bill; it's important.

Thank you, Speaker. Now I'd like to turn the floor over to Mr. Rinaldi, my parliamentary assistant.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Continuing on with the debate, I'd like to recognize the member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning. And thanks to Minister McMeekin for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

Over the past nine months I've had the pleasure of working alongside Minister McMeekin. I have recently joined him in launching the review of our provincial land use plans to help shape communities in central Ontario.

Part of my responsibilities as parliamentary assistant is to ensure that we maintain a rural and agricultural focus

on the coordinated review of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the Greenbelt Plan. Agriculture represents over \$34 billion in revenue for our province. It also accounts for one in nine jobs across Ontario. Preserving our lands and building on rural and agricultural successes is vital to our province's continuous growth.

The proposed Smart Growth for Our Communities Act has been designed to help our small communities and rural municipalities grow and thrive, just as it aims at helping our urban centres. It would provide greater flexibility to meet the local circumstances. For example, northern municipalities will continue to have planning advisory committees at their discretion. This gives them the right to establish planning advisory committees depending on local circumstances.

During our review, we heard that flexibility was important to our diverse municipalities. With Bill 73, if passed, municipalities would have the flexibility to tailor their public engagement policies to meet their local needs. It would allow municipalities to expand their ability to tailor the form and delivery of public notices so that they are effective in each individual community.

This flexibility would also ensure that residents have a greater and more meaningful say in how their communities are growing. It would involve them early in the planning and development process. Municipalities would need to set out in their official plans how and when the public would be consulted, and explain how public input affected their planning decisions.

We want to help municipalities of all sizes engage Ontarians to ensure a more predictable planning system. That also means more control at the local level over official plans. Changes would provide more control and stability over planning documents for our local partners.

We know that official plan reviews take time and resources. This can be particularly challenging for smaller communities and rural municipalities. Less time on the farm or being away from a small business is just not economically viable, Speaker.

The fact is that things don't always change so quickly in smaller communities as they do in larger and more urban centres. That's why flexibility as to when to conduct reviews is particularly important in smaller communities. Under the proposed amendments, new official plans would now be reviewed on a 10-year basis, instead of the current five-year cycle. Once a municipality establishes a new official plan, it would not be subject to new appeals for two years, unless changes are initiated by the municipality itself.

The act will also allow for things to be worked out locally before being sent to the Ontario Municipal Board. That local control is particularly important to smaller communities.

We also know that streamlining the planning and development process just makes sense.

The changes we are proposing will give municipalities an enhanced tool that we would call the community planning system. Some communities have been using a per-

mit planning system for years, and it works. For example, the township of Lake of Bays was the first municipality to put in place a permit system. The township uses the system to better regulate development and protect water quality in environmentally sensitive shoreline areas.

0920

Hundreds of kilometres away, in the town of Carleton Place, the permit system is used to maintain small-town character. They also use the permit system to improve commercial areas and provide for a mix of employment and recreational activities. We are committed to establishing a stakeholder working group to provide advice on implementing the community planning permit system.

The group would also provide recommendations on minor variances. A minor variance is a small change from a zoning bylaw. It would further consider when local appeal bodies could be used for land use planning issues, because we know that streamlining the planning and development process attracts investment and creates jobs.

As Minister McMeekin pointed out, there are still pieces of the puzzle that we need to assess; however, I'm confident that if we pass the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act we would be well on our way to having a solid framework to better help our communities grow. Being smart about how we manage growth is the best way we can ensure that Ontario communities of all sizes, from all regions, are sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, I join Minister McMeekin in supporting Bill 73, and I urge all members to vote for the passing of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

Continuing along with the debate, I'd like to recognize the member from Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise this morning in support of Bill 73. Before I begin my remarks this morning, Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of individuals who were here earlier from the Ontario Home Builders' Association: Joe Vaccaro and Vince Molinaro—they just left. And I believe there is another group, Neptis. Marcy Burchfield and Martha Shuttleworth are here today to observe the debate on Bill 73.

As I begin my remarks in support of Bill 73—you just heard from my colleague from a rural area of Ontario, Northumberland—Quinte West, about the importance of the proposed legislation in supporting rural communities. I'm from the city of Toronto—my riding is Scarborough—Agincourt—but I think this particular bill is good for all of Ontario. The proposed legislation, if passed—it was in 1997 when the Planning Act and the Development Charges Act were passed in legislation; now, almost 20 years later, we're looking at this particular legislation.

There are a number of amendments being proposed by this piece of legislation. I'm going to focus specifically on enhancement of transparency and accountability by all municipalities.

If the legislation is passed, it will require municipalities like the city of Toronto to reflect the capital projects

funded through development charges in more detail. I hear criticism all the time from residents and local businesses, saying, "They levy these developmental charges, but we don't know what they are." So they will require some transparency.

It also will require, if the legislation is passed, them to link the development charges to municipal asset management planning.

Furthermore, it will require developmental charges to be set as of the date an initial building permit is issued for buildings requiring multiple permits—because oftentimes there are multiple projects attached to a development.

More importantly, it will also restrict the payments outside the development charges regime for the capital costs associated with servicing new development and require municipal treasurers to certify that no payments have been received that are in contravention of this restriction. So there will be no surprises. Oftentimes you hear that halfway through the development you get these surprises. We hear that through the local paper oftentimes.

The other piece here is that it will give authority to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to investigate a municipality in relation to the compliance of the legislation. So through the creation of this authority it also means that the municipality will have to cover the cost of this investigation. There is a responsibility on the municipality that if the minister is asking for the investigation, the municipality will have to absorb the cost. I think that's the right thing.

The other thing here about increasing municipal transparency is a concern. I hear a lot because of the urban aspect of the city of Toronto—but we often hear that we're taking away good land for development, as opposed to protecting the farms.

I know the minister spoke earlier about the greenbelt and how important the greenbelt is for Ontario. Increasing transparency will mean that the municipality has to report municipal collection of density bonuses under section 37, as well as parkland fees.

Furthermore, the change in the alternative parkland dedication rate for cash-in-lieu payments to incent the acquisition of the physical parkland—I think most members in this House hear how passionate our Minister of the Environment and Climate Change is, and his advocacy work when it comes to protecting green space, especially in his riding in downtown Toronto. So it is the right thing to do.

Furthermore, the increase in transparency will require municipalities to prepare parks plans, in consultation with local school boards and the public, in order to facilitate planning for parkland/green space and park facilities.

I'm sure during this second reading debate my numerous colleagues who are members from the city of Toronto will be participating in this debate. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, when we are making significant changes to legislation going back to 1997, we need to make sure it's not just good for urban cities like my

riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, but across the province.

The last part of my comments that I want to remind the members—in the beginning part of the proposed bill, Bill 73, the minister clearly stated in the explanatory note which regulations will be changed, which amendments. I think the piece that really interests my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt is the new section 59.1. It imposes a restriction on the use of charges related to development. When you have a very detailed, lengthy bill, these explanatory notes—and for those watching at home right now, you need to take the time to review this particular proposed legislation. But more importantly, this particular bill is about the future of Ontario. We have often heard the Premier, the Minister of Finance and different ministers across the province talking about building Ontario up. At the same time, building Ontario up means we have to protect those natural resources and make sure that development reflects the people's needs and also make sure that the lands are being protected.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak on Bill 73.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Scarborough—Agincourt.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you and good morning, Mr. Speaker. It was a pleasure to listen to the minister and his parliamentary assistants this morning on Bill 73, Smart Growth for Our Communities Act. We do have a lot of issues in planning in our local municipalities. No one will question that. There are reviews that are currently under way. Yet we have this new piece of legislation coming forward from the provincial government.

We heard some platitudes from the minister. One of them: Planning disputes should be dealt with locally wherever possible. The member from Northumberland—Quinte West said we need to have more control at the local level. Let me tell you a little story about what happened yesterday at the appeal court of Ontario.

There was a decision that came down from the appeal court on a Prince Edward county industrial wind turbine project, a proposal for an IWT on the south shore of Prince Edward county. This government has been brushing aside the wishes of residents in Prince Edward county; they've been brushing aside that input from the municipal council. The court of appeal yesterday ruled in favour of local people in Prince Edward county. They ruled in favour of the municipality when it comes to this industrial wind turbine development, a project they don't want in their community, a project that the government's own Environmental Review Tribunal said was going to cause serious and irreversible harm to the habitat and the environment in Prince Edward county. But what is this government continuing to do? What is the Ministry of the Environment continuing to do? Continuing to force this project on this unwilling host municipality. It's going to cause serious harm to the environment, according to the appeals court, according to experts. But what is this government doing? The Ministry of the Environment is con-

tinuing to support a project that everyone, including the experts, is saying is going to cause environmental damage. Does that not seem hypocritical to you, Mr. Speaker?

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I would like to contribute to this part of the debate in questions and comments because the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing talked about transparency and accountability and he talked about policy with some clear direction.

There's an actual issue in my riding that is begging for clarity on a policy. They are the Forked River Brewing Company. They're entrepreneurs that started a couple of years ago and they've been very successful. They want to expand their business into a retail store on a parcel of land on the same site.

In that case, what had happened is that they went ahead and did the renovations and thought they were following the guidelines in this policy. It turns out that even though it's the same parcel of land where they're expanding into the retail store, because it's not the same address, they're going to have barriers or possibly even be denied.

I'm writing the Premier and giving her the letter today. What we're asking is for clarity on this. We're asking for more transparency so that when this craft beer brewery is actually going to start this initiative, they know what they are getting into. It was quite vague.

We know that we promote small business in communities. It's a healthy way to make a city grow. They support the community; they occupy storefronts and promote jobs. I know the government across the way wants to support local business and local agriculture.

I'm just bringing this to light because it was just interesting to hear about how we need clear direction on policies. I think this policy begs clear direction with regard to the Forked River brewery in my riding of London—Fanshawe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: It's a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 73, Smart Growth for Our Communities Act, which amends certain parts of the Planning Act and the Development Charges Act, and to make a few comments in relation to the minister's leadoff.

This is particularly important for the area I represent. Oak Ridges—Markham is in fact the largest riding by population in Canada, with some 250,000 individuals. Obviously we're facing huge growth—we have in York region.

When I first became the medical officer of health in York region in 1988, the population of York region was some 450,000; it's now 1.2 million. Through the years that I was the commissioner of health services, many discussions around the department head table were on this very topic: How to plan for growth? The infrastructure that is needed in a region like York is essential to the

needs of my constituents and to the other people in York region.

I see many parts of this bill that are going to directly reference those types of concerns—development charges now available for transit infrastructure. Knocking on doors some 10 months or so ago, transit, transportation and congestion were huge issues for the residents. This bill will allow municipalities to have a lot more say and allow for citizen engagement, which is, I think, absolutely crucial as well.

I think it's very timely, given that consultation is being engaged in by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on the Greenbelt Act, because that is another very important piece of legislation that has been absolutely embraced by the people of York region. So I'm in full support of Bill 73.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to enter into debate today on Bill 73, the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act.

Earlier today, I flew in from the nation's capital, where I represent one of the fastest-growing ridings not just in Ontario, but in all of Canada. We have a high birth rate; we have a high rate of development in my community. In fact, a decade ago, when I first started out in politics, a great part of my riding had not been developed. Each time I fly into or out of the city of Ottawa, I look down and I see the vast growth that's happening in my own constituency.

That brings me to this piece of legislation. I don't think anyone here denies the fact that in order for growth to happen, growth must pay for growth. I had some time and experience working at the city of Ottawa for a councillor named Jan Harder, who is now the chair of planning and development for the city of Ottawa. When I was a young staffer for her, obviously, planning, growth and development were key issues. So I'm happy to say here that I have some experience in this.

That said, I want to say to this assembly today I am disappointed in this bill for two reasons. First, there was inadequate consultation; therefore, I don't think the members of the city of Ottawa council or municipalities across the province had adequate input into this piece of legislation, which will impact their communities. Second, the minister will admit here that his own mandate letter would require changes to the Municipal Act and a review of the Ontario Municipal Board. That said, this bill, in its tabling, actually talks more about some of these changes before that review has even taken place. I think that's incredibly important.

I would like, with the last few seconds that I have, to commend my colleague from Belleville. He talked about the industrial wind turbines and the fact that they're overriding municipal planning with respect to those. I applaud him for bringing that up. It is a very important point and it does indeed make the government hypocritical on this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask the member from Nepean—Carleton to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I would happily withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I take that as a yes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Sure. I'm happy to withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd like to thank my parliamentary assistant; the member from Scarborough—Agin-court; the member from Prince Edward—Hastings; the member from London—Fanshawe; the Minister of Community and Social Services; and the member from Nepean—Carleton.

Speaker, the best political advice I ever got was from the late, great Sterling Hunt, a farmer up in Lynden, who said to me, "Ted, do you want to get elected? Tell the people what's broke and how you're going to fix it." I've always taken that as pretty good advice.

We did an extensive—over a year long—consultation. We met with AMO and a number of other stakeholders about some of the changes before we introduced this bill. This bill doesn't try to boil the ocean. We're not trying to build Rome in a day; we're trying to build Ontario in a prudent and practical way, and that's different. The bill is seeking to provide some clarity, perhaps on the very kinds of issues that certain members on the other side mentioned. If we could get a handle on some of that, that would be great.

The appeal of the bill, I think, has to do with its desire to engage citizens in substantive, meaningful input—get them from perhaps a cynical frame to a more participatory frame, because that participation will mean something—to empower municipalities to be more innovative, creative and thoughtful in terms of how they work with their stakeholders; and finally to ensure that as much as can be resolved locally is in fact resolved locally. It's very expensive to go to the OMB and very wasteful in many cases.

We want to make sure that citizens have good input, that good planning is done and that municipalities can resolve their difficulties locally.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 73, the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act.

First of all, I want to thank the minister and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the briefing on this bill and the need for it that they provided for me, our caucus and our staff. I want to say there's a lot in the bill, and there's a lot to be supported. But at the same time, as we go through it—and even with the briefing, and I'm sure the minister was advised—there are a number of things that cause some concern that I want to address today.

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The member from Scarborough—Agin-court mentioned the fact that the last time this bill was reviewed was in 1997. From 1995 to 1999, I was parliamentary assistant

to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In the first two years at the ministry, my responsibility was to do the review and the consultation for the changes we made to the Planning Act—two years of consultation, and then we introduced the bill, and we finally got it passed in 1997. So I not only have some understanding of it, but some insight as to the things that were the way they are and why they were that way and why some of the things that are presently being done didn't make sense at that time. I'm afraid they don't make much sense today either, so I think we want to deal with that.

I also appreciate that the government waited some time before they brought this bill forward for debate. As you know, this is a complex bill that will impact municipalities across the province. It will impact where people live and the type of neighbourhoods they live in, so we need to take the time to get it right. In fact, it seems that we're still debating this bill too soon.

When this debate was scheduled, we followed up with a number of our stakeholders to hear their concerns about the bill and found out that many of them have not yet completed their review and analysis. The minister mentioned that one of the major stakeholders that he consulted with was AMO. We consulted AMO on what they thought of this bill in the last three or four days, and we find out that they haven't completed their review yet to be able to tell us what's right and what they believe corresponds with what they said or whether they think it will help or hinder the municipalities. So I think it's fair to say that we may still be a little premature with the debate on this until we have all the facts coming in from all the stakeholders.

There were other stakeholders that, in fact, were also consulted that weren't finished. One pointed out that the deadline to comment on the bill on the Environmental Registry is June 4. That is the date that they have been working towards. It seems that people expected the government would consult before pushing ahead and debating this bill. Again, June 4—all the comments to the Environmental Registry. They would have hoped that the government would have waited for that before we have this debate. Obviously, it would have helped my presentation today if I'd known what the stakeholders believe needs to be corrected in the bill, which I could bring forward to the government.

Mr. Speaker, there's another reason that this debate is premature. According to his mandate letter, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Attorney General are to work together with stakeholders to "recommend possible reforms that would improve the OMB's role within the broader land use planning system." That review hasn't even started, but the minister has introduced legislation to amend the appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board. If the minister is planning to hold a real review, and if he's planning to actually listen to stakeholders, then shouldn't that review take place before he introduces legislation? Shouldn't he take the time to hear from the stakeholders about what change is needed? I think we all agree that the system could work

better, but we need a proper review to ensure that we make the right changes, not just change for change's sake.

Mr. Speaker, in anticipation of the review last fall, I filed a written question to the Attorney General, who is responsible for the operation of the Ontario Municipal Board. I asked in what percentage of cases the Ontario Municipal Board approved a development that the municipalities had previously denied; in other words, how many times did they tell the municipalities they disagreed with them and approved it anyway? The response that I received from the ministry said that neither they nor the Ontario Municipal Board actually tracks that information. That means that not only are we making changes before we hear about the problems with the current system, but we are making changes without knowing the results of the current system and how well it is balanced for both sides.

Mr. Speaker, municipal planning and the Planning Act is about balance. It's about ensuring that individuals, community groups and businesses have input into the future of their communities. It's about responding to concerns while ensuring that the good projects can move forward. It's about ensuring that families can have a new home and new businesses can be built and create jobs, while controlling sprawl, protecting our environment and preserving agricultural land.

As I said earlier, the minister mentioned the issue of extending timelines for appeals and so forth. Again, I think the system is really predicated on trying to make sure that everything can be completed in a reasonable amount of time, because—what do they say?—time's a-wasting, time is money and time is what stops productivity. We want to move things through properly.

Right now, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is conducting a review of the greenbelt, the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges moraine, and the growth plan, and those reviews are another reason the debate on this bill is premature. The ministry has actually named it the coordinated land use planning review. Wouldn't you think that you should complete that review before you change the Planning Act to incorporate all the things that we find out in this review? I suppose we could hope or suggest that maybe they want to review this on an annual basis, to review it and change it this year and then, when the other reviews are done, come back and do it another year.

In fact, one of the sections of this bill impacts both the greenbelt and the Oak Ridges moraine, because it removes the right to appeal these boundaries in the official plan. It also removes the rights of properties included in the source water protection areas, the properties restricted under the Lake Simcoe Protection Act and the growth plan.

We recognize that the official plan is not the most effective way to appeal, but right now people don't feel that they have an opportunity to appeal at all. I recently met with an individual who has a property that already has municipal services and is surrounded by develop-

mental area. During the first greenbelt consultation, this property was always shown in the settlement area where growth could occur, but when the final boundaries came out, his property was suddenly in the greenbelt and he could no longer build a house on it.

He questioned this decision, and apparently someone from municipal affairs and housing came out to visit the property. When they arrived, they discovered the mistake: Someone in Toronto had read the map wrong and thought that there was a river on his property that should be protected. The river actually wasn't on his property; it was on the neighbour's property.

The property owner tried and tried to get his property back out of the greenbelt, but he hasn't been able to get his concerns addressed. He told me that when he talked to a previous Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, he said he couldn't make the change for this property owner, or he'd have to make it for everyone who asked, to which the property owner replied, "Minister, if they were all mistakes like mine, you should make the changes for everyone."

I've heard from people who believe that there were mistakes both ways: municipalities that have land adjacent to a development area—where they've already spent the money to install services—which was included in the greenbelt, while environmentally sensitive land was excluded and could be developed. For example, we've heard from a community group in Belfountain that believes that the settlement area around their village is too large and includes environmentally sensitive land.

The problem is that currently there isn't a real appeal mechanism for these lands' land use designation, so it appears that some property owners, in frustration, are appealing their designation in the official plan to the Ontario Municipal Board. That is problematic for a few reasons. First, it puts the municipalities in a difficult position of being forced to defend decisions that they didn't make and that were given to them by the province. Secondly, the Ontario Municipal Board is restricted in the decisions that they can make, because they must conform with or have regard to provincial policy. In many cases, this means that the property owner would go through an expensive appeal process without the OMB having the ability to change their designation.

Removing the appeal of the official plan isn't the solution to the problem. It's like the house has a leaky roof, and the government looked at the buckets collecting water in the kitchen and said, "We'll solve the problem by taking away the buckets." The solution is to create a real appeal mechanism, Mr. Speaker, one that doesn't depend on the minister's political will and one that doesn't involve appealing to the same group that made the initial decision; an appeal process that gives property owners, municipalities and communities the opportunity to present their case to an objective third party and have a real objective decision, one that will correct mistakes if mistakes were made.

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I hope that the individual problems I've mentioned will be addressed through the land use review, but I also

hope that as a result of that review property owners will have a real system that will allow them to appeal future mistakes.

When the coordinated land use planning review began, I wrote the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to outline a number of items that we felt were essential in the review. One of those was that there should be an appeal process. Another was that the review should be public, open and transparent, and that members of the public must be able to participate.

The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock recently raised concerns that people in her riding who are directly impacted by the Oak Ridges moraine act and the greenbelt aren't being given an opportunity to participate in the public hearings. As the mayor of Brock township said in a recent article, "It's difficult to understand why all of these meetings are south of the (Oak Ridges) moraine.... We should have an opportunity to discuss what I call the unintended consequences of the greenbelt." Minister, these are people who want to have a say in planning decisions that directly impact their community. I ask you to give them that opportunity by holding a review meeting in north Durham.

One of the other points that I raised in the letter to the minister was that every person whose property is going to be included in the expanded greenbelt should be consulted. When the greenbelt was established, the government held consultations on draft boundaries. I think many of us remember that there were a number of changes following a \$10,000-a-plate Liberal fundraiser. But what wasn't as high-profile is that when the final version was released there were a number of changes, such as new properties being included, that weren't proposed to be in the greenbelt previously. That means that those people, like the one that I mentioned earlier, had no opportunity to voice their concerns or to explain why their property shouldn't be included.

I just want to explain that a little bit, Mr. Speaker. I remember that when the process was there they had the tentative lines drawn for the greenbelt and they went out to public consultation, sent a group out to do that. When they came back they came back with a report to put the final lines on. I remember being here at Queen's Park, at a committee meeting, and one of the reporters asked me what I thought of the final draft. I said, "I haven't seen it yet." She said, "There's a great area that was not in the previous study area that is now part of the greenbelt." I said, "Well, that's rather strange. We used to have a program like that at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and if you wanted to build a building on your farm, you could actually go to the ministry and you could ask them to do a study on where, wind-wise and from snow loads and so forth, would be the ideal place to put that building on your farm. This sounds like one of those cases where the ministry comes back with the wonderful solution that says, 'We found the perfect place to build your new barn.' The farmer says to him, 'Where is that?' and he says, 'It's on your neighbour's farm.'"

I think that's what happened here. These people that were put in when they weren't in the study area never

had a say at all as to what they thought of it and what impact that would have on them. I think it's very important that that is done.

As I said, we believe that people who are being impacted by the planning process should have the ability to participate in that process and have their views heard. I think the minister alluded to that in his comments, that this bill is to do that to get people the opportunity to be heard to help plan their communities. I really believe that the bill doesn't go far enough in that area.

In this bill the government is proposing to change the rules around community consultation. The example that the government gives is that the distance for notice requirements would be altered for rural municipalities. Now, the problem is, why is it for rural municipalities? Why is the distance not consistent for everyone?

Now, of course, in rural municipalities, the distances where the impact would be are much further apart, but the properties are not; the properties run side by side. I think what we need to do is we need to make sure that everyone gets notice when changes are being made.

However, this amendment also exempts municipalities from section 19, subsection (2), which states, "Every person who attends a public meeting required under clause 15(d) shall be given an opportunity to make representations in respect of the current proposed plan." Removing the requirement of this section weakens the public's ability to participate in the planning communities.

Again, we get to a certain point where they're going to be notified but they're not going to be allowed to speak to the application.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that you have worked with community groups who have concerns about the planning and development, just as I have. Many of them are volunteers. They have very busy lives working and raising families, but they make time to raise concerns about the issues because they believe that it will have a significant impact on the future of their communities.

I want to give you two examples from my riding. The first is a group of citizens who are opposing a proposed landfill site in Beachville. The proposal would locate a landfill on fractured bedrock in an old quarry near the Thames River. We're all concerned that this location would put our drinking water at risk. These citizens are working hard to make their concerns heard. They are sending postcards, letters and emails. They're signing petitions, which I've read—many of them frequently, and sometimes even more frequently than the Speaker would like—in this Legislature. They have come to Queen's Park. If there is a public meeting that impacts them, shouldn't we make sure that they have a right to be heard? Shouldn't we make sure that they have a right to voice their concerns about the safety of their drinking water?

The other group that I want to mention is one which has been working hard to oppose wind turbines in the Gunn's Hill area. They too have worked hard to make their concerns known. They have written and emailed. They did all their research and spent countless hours

trying to make everyone understand their concerns about wind turbines, from the impact on their health and the community to the danger they pose to planes flying into a nearby airport. Again, I believe that all the members of this group have a right to be heard at public meetings which impact them.

I know that the government had good intentions in reforming that section to allow consultation to be tailored to the individual municipalities, but I think we need to ensure that we maintain some minimum standards that ensure the public has the ability to voice their concerns.

The government is also proposing to create new planning committees through this legislation. It's another case of where we're trying to improve public participation but totally missing the mark. The proposal is to create a new planning advisory committee which would have at least one member that is not a municipal employee or a municipal counselor.

The flaw in the proposal is that many municipalities, such as those in Oxford, currently have planning discussions and make planning decisions at open council meetings which are regularly attended by the media and members of the public. Concerned citizens have the ability to see the agendas, attend the meetings and make presentations, and the local media is there to report those decisions.

This proposal would move these discussions to a separate planning committee that would likely have less public attending and less media attention. Since the majority of the committee would still be members of council, it is less likely that they will feel the need to repeat the entire debate and discussion when the issues come back to council for their final approval. The result would be that one member of the public would be involved in the committee and the rest of the public will have less information and input into the planning. For many municipalities it would also result in a new committee that simply duplicates what council is presently doing.

Sometimes government has a tendency to look at each idea individually without stepping back and looking at the impact as a whole. This legislation would require municipalities to produce a report on the use of money obtained through section 37 to create and make public a parks plan and it will require a more detailed report on development charge reserve funds, including an asset plan. It will also require the creation of the new planning advisory committee.

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All of these things individually may be positive, but they also add up to an increased burden to our municipalities, many of whom are already struggling. Our municipalities have limited resources. Many of them are performing a significant amount of work with very little staff.

In his 2014 speech to the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook talked about the challenges faced by people like the mayor of Bancroft, Bernice Jenkins. Bancroft has a

population of 3,500, less than 2,000 households, but they are required to complete over 270 financial reports to the government a year.

The government designs legislation for Toronto, Mississauga and Ottawa without looking at the impact on many of our smaller municipalities. Many of our rural and northern municipalities operate with very limited staff.

Today, I want to issue a challenge to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I'm going to ask him to review the paperwork and reporting requirements for our municipalities. For each new report the government requires, such as those in this bill, I'm hoping that he can find an unnecessary report or form to eliminate. It's something to do with a program of the government called Open for Business. I think we should apply it to this bill and make sure we remove as many unnecessary regulations and reports in that process as we're adding with this bill.

As I just mentioned, one of the changes in this bill is to require detailed assessment management plans for infrastructure and services that are funded through development charges. The Ontario Good Roads Association has been a huge advocate of asset management plans, but they have pointed out multiple times that consistent standards need to be developed for these plans.

While we should allow flexibility or phasing in for those municipalities that already have a system in place, I want to point out that the best time to create those standards is now, before the government expands the system. Once municipalities have set up a reporting system, changing the methods will be far more costly and time-consuming.

Again, we want the government to take the time to get it right. It seems that in many ways, they have rushed to introduce this legislation without having all the details ready.

This bill proposes a number of changes to the Development Charges Act. These are the fees that builders pay to municipalities to fund infrastructure such as sewers, water and roads. This is another area where the government doesn't appear to be ready. When they announced this legislation, they also announced that they would be forming a working group to look at "more complex land use planning and development charges issues, and propose solutions." We've set up people to look at how we should fix the problem, and here we are legislating the problem to be fixed, without having those answers.

To me, the best time to introduce legislation is after you've figured out the solutions, not before, especially when the changes you are proposing will increase development charges and, therefore, the cost of building a business or a new home.

Currently in the Development Charges Act, there is a section that lists the number of items that municipalities cannot charge development fees for. This includes cultural or entertainment facilities, including museums, theatres and art galleries. It includes tourism facilities,

such as convention centres, and it includes city halls. The government is proposing instead to move all of these excluded items into regulation. That means we don't know what new businesses and homeowners could be charged for. This section is in the Development Charges Act for their protection, to ensure that the development charges they pay are for services that are required to service their property and not for other services beyond what the community presently has. Removing these sections would allow massive increases in development charges, which would be a hidden tax on new homeowners and businesses.

This bill allows development charges to increase by allowing them to be calculated based on planned level of service rather than a historical average of what level of service they had been delivering. Mr. Speaker, I think that's a very important point to make, that with the change there, in fact, the municipality can look at where you have a fair amount of new development coming on stream—so we're going to add a number of items in the bylaw that we're going to charge for—services we don't presently provide, but we can ask new housing to pay for a higher level of service, so when that's built and we have all those development charges—in fact, a certain part of our community paid for services that everyone is going to use. That's why it was in the bill the other way, in the Development Charges Act, that they have to stay on the level of the services that they presently have, and then, as we increase the level of services, everyone pays their equal share of that, and new homeowners aren't paying it all.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ensure that the people, particularly those at home, understand the levels of development charges that we're discussing here. This isn't, as it used to be, the price of a building permit is \$100 and the development charge is \$1,000, to provide all those services.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing reported that municipalities collected over \$1.8 billion in development charges in 2013 alone. They pay for sewers, roads, water and other infrastructure.

A 2009 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. study found that government-imposed charges, including development charges, represented up to 19% of the median price of a single detached home.

The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario commissioned a report called *Alternatives to Development Charges for Growth-Related Capital Costs*. It found that development charges are now \$30,000 to \$50,000 per single-family home in high-growth municipalities surrounding Toronto. By comparison, it found that development fees in Calgary and Edmonton are less than \$8,000 per unit.

The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario reported that a 2009 survey calculated that the average development charge or fee for single-family homes in the United States was \$8,328. Referring back to the other one: In the Toronto area, they're from \$30,000 to \$50,000. The average in the United States is \$8,328.

The state with the highest average fee is California, at \$21,648—half of the highest rate in the Toronto area—followed by Florida, with an average of \$8,000—again, from \$21,000 down to \$8,000. Florida is the next one down, at \$8,974.

In the report we also found this quote: "Upward pressure on development charge revenue is a result of fiscal pressure that municipalities face due to reduction in funding from senior levels of government."

Maybe we know now why it is that this government is putting this in the bill to encourage higher development charges. It's because reduced funding from the province has forced the municipalities to do that.

When the government introduced this legislation, the Ontario Home Builders' Association said, "The Ontario Home Builders' Association is concerned that new transit taxes on development will disproportionately increase housing costs for residents and the cost of setting up new businesses."

We need to recognize that those development charges are a cost that is passed on from the builder to the new homeowner. It is an added cost into building the home, but it is passed directly on to new people moving into the community.

There was a lot of media coverage recently when it was announced that the average cost of a detached house in Toronto is now over a million dollars. That puts a house out of reach for most young couples and families. In fact, many young people are struggling to buy a small condo, and this bill will only increase the cost of a new house.

Housing has become a real challenge for our province. There are 165,000 families on a waiting list for social housing—Mr. Speaker, 165,000. The minister mentioned in his presentation that this was going to help that, but I disagree. If we assume an average of even two people per family in the 165,000, that's more people than in the entire population of Kitchener or Windsor, and it's twice the size of Oshawa and Sudbury. Imagine that: As many people as the whole city of Windsor are waiting for housing.

In fact, Acorn, a community group that advocates for housing, said, "The new proposed Smart Growth for Our Communities Act (Bill 73) does"—and it emphasizes it—"nothing to solve the housing crisis in Ontario. We believe affordable housing is smart!"

Mr. Speaker, there are steps that we need to take to address this problem.

Last week the Legislature gave my bill, the Housing Services Corporation Accountability Act, second reading, and it was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. I want to ask all members of this House to work with me to ensure that we move it through the committee and bring it back here for third reading quickly.

My bill would bring accountability and transparency to the rogue agency that has been diverting money intended to build, repair, and maintain social housing. Instead, the Housing Services Corp. has spent the money on world travel and questionable investments, such as

putting money into a company in Manchester, England, that only existed on paper and whose corporate address is a lawyer's office.

Taking action to address the wasting of social housing dollars is only part of the solution; we also need to address the cost of living for all Ontarians. Part of that is ensuring balance on development charges and ensuring they can't be used to pay for building things like a new city hall. I think that's the important part; that's why I emphasized it when I mentioned the items before. I think things like the city hall should not be put on the backs of new people coming in—they should be paid equally by everyone in the municipality at the time that it's being built. I think that would help keep the cost of housing down.

Part of that is looking at other factors in the cost of living, such as hydro. When I hear from people in my riding or across the province who can't afford to stay in their home the most frequent reason is the spiralling cost of hydro. Those costs aren't just impacting homeowners, they're impacting businesses as well, Mr. Speaker. I recently conducted an annual survey of Oxford businesses. The common theme was that respondents were worried about the increasing cost of doing business in Ontario; 94% of businesses said they had been impacted by the spiralling cost of hydro.

When new businesses are looking at which jurisdiction to locate in, costs are a significant factor. We heard that from many of the businesses that have chosen to leave Ontario. Businesses are already worried about the new costs that this government is proposing. In my survey, 90% of Oxford businesses said they would be impacted by the proposed pension plan and most of these said the impact would be significant; 86% of the respondents said they would be impacted by a carbon tax.

All of these costs, including development charges, are factors that businesses consider when they choose where they are going to build and create jobs. Increasing development charges has an impact that needs to be considered. A Metrolinx investment strategy found that increasing development charges “include the potential for increased housing and commercial development prices that may reduce housing affordability and increase business costs.”

The charges on new businesses have a direct impact on our economic development. But there's an indirect impact from the development charges on new homes. Builders are willing to pay their fair share for roads, water and sewers, but if these are allowed to increase too much it will slow the building industry.

A recent Maclean's article pointed out that the real estate sector makes up 13% of Canada's GDP and is a bigger employer than the mining, oil and gas sectors. It said, “The economy certainly relies more on what gets built above ground than what lies beneath” it.

Earlier I explained this bill would remove the section that prevents development charges from being increased to pay for city halls, art galleries and convention centres. That may be the worst way that it increases development

charges, but it's not the only one. Currently, development charges are discounted by 10% for a number of items, including transit, and this bill would remove that discount. It will add millions to the amount that the builders pay in development fees.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the time has almost expired. With that, I will leave this and hopefully we can come back to it the next time we meet to debate Bill 73.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member from Oxford.

Seeing that it is now 10:15, this Legislature is recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I'm very excited today to welcome a mentor and a great friend of mine, somebody who I'm honoured to serve in my great community of Ottawa Centre. I ask members to please welcome Penny Collenette to Queen's Park. Penny, welcome and thank you for all your support.

Mr. John Vanthof: On behalf of the member from Essex, I would like to congratulate our page captain for the day, Chloe Mastronardi, and introduce her mother, Sheila Mastronardi; her father, Terry Mastronardi; and her cousin Sylvana Mastronardi. They're joining us in the public gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Today is the first day of the Ridvan festival of the Baha'i faith. I have two distinguished guests from my riding of Richmond Hill visiting the House: Mr. and Mrs. Missaghie. Please join me in welcoming them.

MINISTERS' ATTENDANCE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The House leaders for the official opposition—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Speaker is standing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, members from Renfrew.

The House leaders for the official opposition and the third party have each provided me with a written notice of intent to raise a point of privilege, as required by standing order 21(c). The government House leader also provided me with a written submission on this matter. The notices relate to a decision by several ministers to attend an April 15, 2015, lock-up and press conference dealing with the report of the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets in a government building located outside the precincts. These events apparently overlapped with the timing of question period and therefore meant that those ministers would not be available to answer oral questions on that day.

I would like to thank the members for giving me sufficient time to carefully review the issues raised in their

notices. Given the thrust of our precedents on the issues, together with Speaker Carr's April 23, 2001, decision to rule on the matter of ministerial attendance at question period without hearing further from the member who raised it, I too will be ruling without hearing further from the members, as standing order 21(d) permits the Speaker to do.

Ministerial attendance at question period has been the subject of many previous points of order, but no Speaker has ever held that a member is required to be in this chamber at any specific time, let alone during question period. As Speaker Carr noted in his 2001 ruling, "The many and varied duties of being an elected member of this House often legitimately demand our attendance elsewhere. Honourable members are assumed by their honourable colleagues to have valid, defensible and justifiable reasons for being absent from the House when it is meeting. This is one of the principal reasons why it is prohibited by our traditions and practices to draw the attention of the House to the absence of another member."

With respect specifically to ministerial attendance at question period, as far back as April 19, 1977, Speaker Rowe stated the following: "It is surely the duty of the executive council to see that there are sufficient members of the council in the House during the question period to make it meaningful. Certainly, the Speaker cannot be expected to take on this obligation."

For similar approaches taken by other Speakers, I refer members to Speaker Turner's November 5, 1984, ruling; Speaker Edighoffer's April 24, 1990, ruling; Speaker Warner's May 13, 1992, ruling; Speaker Stockwell's April 21, 1997, ruling; and Speaker Peters's February 22, 2010, ruling. In short, it is well established that ministers cannot be compelled to attend question period on any given day, nor is the Speaker in any position to enforce such attendance.

Parenthetically, I will reference here the assertion made by the member from Leeds–Grenville in his written notice that there was no need for those absent ministers to attend the lock-up. I am not sure any member of this House really wants to be in the business of second-guessing the priorities of another honourable member, if they think carefully about the implications of doing so.

On the issue of policy announcements, previous Speakers have indicated that it is preferable for the government of the day to make them in the House before doing so outside the House. I agree with that position. In fact, past Speakers have indicated that members who object to policy announcements being made outside the House before being made inside the House have a legitimate grievance.

That being said, those same Speakers have also indicated there is no authority in the standing orders that would allow the Speaker to require the government to make such announcements in the House before doing so by other means.

Turning to the privilege arguments in the notices, the member from Leeds–Grenville contends that the absence of several ministers meant that members were deprived

of the ability to hold the government to account for its policies and were therefore obstructed and impeded in the discharge of their functions. Accordingly, the member asserts that the absence of those ministers was a contempt of the Legislature.

As previous Speakers have indicated, question period is an important part of the parliamentary day because it facilitates the assembly's accountability function. I accept that it can be frustrating for an opposition member who has an oral question for a specific minister to find that that minister will not be available on a given day. However, nothing prevents the oral question from being placed and answered because the principle of collective cabinet responsibility means that another minister can either answer the question or undertake to get one. That member's frustration does not equate to an inability to fulfill his or her parliamentary responsibilities, and it does not rise to a contempt of the House.

As noted on page 509 of the second edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*:

"Questions, although customarily addressed to specific ministers, are directed to the ministry as a whole. It is the prerogative of the government to designate which minister responds to which question.... The Prime Minister (or the Deputy Prime Minister or any other minister acting on behalf of the Prime Minister) may respond to any or all questions posed during question period. Only one minister may respond to a question, and it need not be the one to whom the question is addressed who actually answers it. A different minister may, under certain circumstances, reply to a supplementary question.

"The Speaker has no authority to compel a particular minister to respond" to a question.

There is no authority for the proposition that a minister's absence from this chamber in order to attend to other responsibilities amounts to obstruction of the House or its members in the exercise of their parliamentary functions.

For his part, the member for Timmins–James Bay suggests that last Thursday's government announcement equates to a situation that happened in 2003, when the government of the day presented a budget-type speech outside the House at a time when the Legislature was prorogued. In that case, Speaker Carr had found that a *prima facie* case of contempt had been established because the government of the day might have been purposely circumventing parliamentary processes when it expressly indicated that the presentation was motivated by its desire to have a "direct conversation with the people of Ontario."

Unlike what happened in 2003, there has been no similarly explicit indication by the government relating to the intention of last Thursday's lock-up and press conference. In addition, whereas there is a tradition of making budget presentations in the House, no such tradition attaches to the tabling of a report or an announcement in respect of such.

In this instance, then, the government's policy announcement outside the House was rather similar to the

announcements that previous governments have often made outside the House.

With respect to the argument that restrictions were placed on the number of members who could attend the lock-up, the lock-up is not a proceeding in Parliament, and in fact did not even take place in the parliamentary precinct, so it is not a matter for the Speaker. The important point is that nothing prevented members from being in the House, if they so chose, to exercise their privilege of freedom of speech.

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For the foregoing reasons, I find that the member from Leeds–Grenville and the member from Timmins–James Bay have not made a *prima facie* case of privilege or contempt.

In closing, I thank all parties for providing me with their submissions on this matter.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): One moment, please.

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yesterday, the member from Leeds–Grenville provided me with an additional written notice of intent to raise a point of privilege, as required by standing order 21(c). The notice refers to the release last week of the report of the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets, and principally about the fact the announcement took place outside the Legislative Assembly and at a time that conflicted with the day's question period.

I have to advise the member that I cannot accept his notice. A point of privilege must be raised at the earliest opportunity after the alleged breach has occurred. Having received the member's notice only late last night, which relates to events that occurred four days previous, I do not believe the member has met the timeline's requirement.

However, I think the member will also see in the ruling I just delivered that the matter he sought to raise was fully addressed in my response to the notice provided by his colleague the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Point of order from the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you for your ruling, Speaker. We're going to continue to hold this government to account.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the members for their attention.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. The electricity system in Ontario is in a mess. You've

wasted \$2 billion on smart meters, \$1.1 billion on cancelled gas plants, and rates have skyrocketed by more than \$1,000 a year for the average homeowner since you took office. The people are fed up with your hydro mismanagement.

Now you're planning to sell a majority stake in Hydro One—60%, in fact—to raise money you can't come up with otherwise.

But don't worry, Mr. Speaker. The Premier says that rates might not go up because the Ontario Energy Board is there to protect consumers, the same energy board that just approved a rate increase of over \$68 a year.

Premier, why should ratepayers believe your line that the OEB will limit rate increases, when yesterday they did the exact opposite?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just address part of this question. I know that we will speak to the rates in the supplementary.

Let me just be clear that the reason we have undertaken the review of assets in this province, the reason that Ed Clark and his panel were asked to look at the assets that were built by and owned by the people of Ontario, and have served the people of Ontario very well, is that we need to build new assets. We need to build new infrastructure that will serve us in the current environment and in the future. If we don't do that, if we don't make those investments, then we actually hobble the ability of this province to be able to grow, we hobble the ability of communities to be able to thrive, and we restrict the attraction of Ontario to businesses from other places. So we must make these investments in infrastructure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Back to the Premier: I don't think I'm the only Ontarian who's skeptical of your plan. After all, you never campaigned on it and you never held public consultations. You just did it. There's not even a cost-benefit analysis of the majority sale. Yet you and your trusted adviser Ed Clark assured Ontarians that rates won't go up with confident phrases like "We don't think so" and "I can't guarantee they won't."

Premier, you and I both know you don't care about what the ratepayer pays, just as long as you get your money.

A simple question, Premier: Would you still have sold the majority stake in Hydro One if you had balanced the budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said repeatedly, and I will continue to say because it is the truth, what I care about is absolutely that we have an affordable and a reliable supply of energy. Quite frankly, when we came into office in 2003, the hydro system—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I'm absolutely ready to bring people to order and I'll do so quickly. Very little interruption for question, and lots of interruption for answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There was absolutely no reliability in the electricity system when we came into office. There were blackouts and brownouts. I can re-

member knocking on doors in 2003, and the number one issue was people not knowing whether their power supply was—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Leader of the Opposition will come to order. The member from Nepean—Carleton will come to order. Thank you.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There was no confidence in the electricity system. There were brownouts and blackouts across the province. It was absolutely imperative, when we came into office, that we rebuild the system, that we do the upgrading that was necessary.

We've done that upgrading. As the member opposite knows, there is a cost associated with that. He also knows that the Ontario Energy Board sets rates and will set rates—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, it's obvious that what has happened here is you promised a lot more than you can deliver. You drove the province into the ground for 12 years, and now the only way out is on the backs of ratepayers.

You continue to say that the OEB will regulate prices and that they won't go up, but every bit of evidence confirms the complete opposite. Ontarians have your word on one hand and the energy board's latest increase on the other.

Premier, as the PC caucus's fifth and final ask, will you commit to reducing energy prices so that all ratepayers and businesses no longer have to pay some of the highest energy costs in North America?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear about the Ontario Energy Board. Rate applications go before the Ontario Energy Board.

Some of the history is, in 2010, Hydro One asked for a rate increase for distribution and received a 9% reduction. In 2012, Hydro One asked for a rate increase for transmission and received a 3% reduction. When Ontario Power Generation applied for a 6.2% rate increase in 2011, the OEB denied this request and lowered rates by 0.8%.

There is a history of the OEB refusing requests for rate increases, because they can—

Mr. John Yakabuski: The rates are going down, Bob. People are so happy that the rates are going down.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke will come to order.

Stop the clock, please.

Now I will also remind you that I am not impressed when I hear people use anything else other than their riding or their title, when speaking—at all.

New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Jim Wilson: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Ed Clark's report on the sale of Hydro One offers a handful of recommendations, the first being, "The province should proceed immediately with a sale or merger of its interests in Hydro One Brampton ... to or with EnerSource Corp., PowerStream ... and Horizon...."

The report simply speculates that the government would receive \$607 million for the sale. It offers no evidence on how the sale price was calculated. We are simply being asked to take the Premier's and Mr. Clark's word for it.

Premier, will you call for the Auditor General to help to review the Hydro One Brampton deal so Ontarians will have some assurance that they're receiving the best value?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Energy is going to want to comment on the specifics.

But let me again remind the party opposite and their interim leader that what we are doing here is, we have made a decision and we ran on this decision—it was in our budget—to invest in infrastructure and, as part of that, to review the assets that were owned by the people of this province, to make sure that we were optimizing the value of those assets so that we could invest in the roads and bridges—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton—second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —in every riding across this province, because there is not a community, there is not a region of this province that doesn't need investment in roads, in bridges, in public transit.

Because of the neglect of government after government—because of the work that was not done before 2003—we need to continue to make those investments if we are going to be competitive in the 21st century. That's the commitment I made, and that's the commitment that we're following through on.

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Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: That's not a very good answer for one of the biggest asset sales in the history of the province.

This government's financial mismanagement has been embarrassing: billions of taxpayers' dollars wasted every time you take a turn.

For a Premier who came in preaching openness and transparency, something about this Hydro One Brampton sale simply does not add up. Why should the people of Ontario believe that a pre-arranged sale, organized in secret by the Premier's backroom, is the best deal for an asset that they own?

Premier, if you intend on selling Hydro One Brampton, will you put it on the open market to ensure Ontarians get fair value for the company that they own?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The Premier set up the asset council with very experienced people, a mixture of people from different backgrounds, different parties, different philosophies, but headed up by Mr. Ed Clark. They created a revolving door of advisers and consultants coming in to explore all of the elements of the recommendations that they were making. At the end of the day, the selling price was close to twice as much as Hydro One had paid for it, a very significant uplift in value, which represents a very good investment of a previous government to do that.

The reality is we had seven municipalities, seven mayors and seven councils, we expect, who have supported this, because it improves it for the ratepayer and improves the revenue for all of those cities, including Markham and Barrie and many others.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier: We simply don't accept that your backroom political dealings and pre-arranged sale is the best value for this public asset.

You were wrong when you said the cost of cancelling gas plants was \$40 million when it really was \$1.1 billion. You were wrong when you said the Green Energy Act would cost hydro customers about the price of a cup of coffee when the real cost is \$1,100 per year.

With the last 12 years of fiscal mismanagement in this province, no one—no one—accepts that your deal is the best deal for this public asset. Why should they accept your word for it? Your word simply is no good when it comes to these transactions.

Premier, the people of Ontario deserve all the information respecting the value and sale of Hydro One Brampton, again, an asset that they own. Why won't you allow the Auditor General to review the sale before it goes through?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Energy?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The merger we're looking at is not a 407 deal. It's not a deal where we sell off to somebody and let them make profit out of it, and let them hold 100% control. That's what they did with 407.

We have created here—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It could be with you.

Finish, please.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We have created here a utility of one million customers which rivals Toronto Hydro, the second-largest in the province. There were seven municipalities involved, seven utilities, which came together to create this consolidation. It's good for the ratepayer. It's good for the shareholders, all of the councils, and every single mayor of seven cities endorsed it.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier is planning to privatize Hydro One. She said she was going to govern from something she called the activist centre. It turns out that the activist centre is so far to the right that even the Tories are saying that the Premier's privatization plan for Ontario is bad. It's a bit rich for the Premier to insist she's leading a progressive government when she's right of the Conservatives.

Can the Premier explain exactly how it is that she lost her way so terribly?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, come to order.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, I understand why the leader of the third party wants to go through a recalibrating exercise for herself to relocate herself on the political continuum, because who knows where she was in the election? Who knows what she stands for?

What we stand for is making practical decisions that are in the best interests of this province. Right now, across this province, we need to invest in infrastructure. There is no doubt. I have sat with groups of mayors after groups of mayors, whether it's in the north, whether it's in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, whether it's large urban mayors or rural mayors, and they have said to me unanimously that they need investment in infrastructure. That is a necessity, so that's what we're doing. We ran on that. We said that we were going to invest in roads, bridges and transit, and that's what we're going to do.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier is creating a brand new beer ombudsman, so that people can complain if their beer is flat, but she's pushing the Ontario Ombudsman out of Hydro One. The Premier has a pretty serious problem with her priorities here. Why does she think that the people of Ontario deserve less oversight with their electricity system?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have been very clear, it was very much a concern of mine and ours that there be oversight, that there be control, that the province have a 40% share and have the controls in terms of regulation and price control that are in place right now, and that we continue those.

But let me just speak to the ideological bent that the leader of the third party is on right now, and just give her some feedback from some of the people who actually think this is a good idea. First of all, let me quote from the Power Workers' Union. This is Don MacKinnon, the president of the Power Workers' Union: "The Power Workers' Union welcomes and supports the decision by government to keep Hydro One whole in an IPO process that would, in partnership with government, broaden the ownership structure in Hydro One. This will position the

company to grow and provide further high-skill quality jobs for Ontarians.”

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier is spending months and months, exhaustive amounts of time, to study whether she wants to sell 12-packs of beer in the LCBO—in 10 stores. On the other hand, she doesn’t need any time at all—no time whatsoever—to decide to sell off Hydro One to Bay Street, a plan that will mean higher electricity bills for every single Ontarian. That’s on top of the \$70, of course, that was announced as an increase yesterday by the Ontario Energy Board.

This plan is wrong. The Premier’s priorities are wrong. The Premier has lost her way. My question is, will she pull the plug on this wrong-headed privatization plan?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I understand that the leader of the third party is trying to find her way. I would suggest that supporting a plan that would invest in transit infrastructure, roads and bridges across the province might be a way to help her back to her way.

I will also remind her that the Ontario Energy Board, which sets prices now, will set prices after this deal is in place.

I want to just again remind the member opposite that this is also about creating jobs. Joseph Mancinelli, who is the vice-president and central and eastern Canada regional manager of LIUNA, the building trades, says, “The Wynne Liberal government is to be commended for today’s announcement implementing sweeping changes in our province which will greatly benefit all Ontarians. The \$4 billion these changes will introduce for investment in infrastructure projects, the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario’s history, is welcome news to LIUNA and our members. Job creation is one of the key components of this initiative and we welcome the much-needed infrastructure and the thousands of jobs that will be created for our members for years to come.”

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I hope that the Premier told Joe that \$4 billion won’t even get half of the downtown relief line built.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier says that a privatized Hydro One won’t be under the Ombudsman’s—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Question, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier says that a privatized Hydro One won’t be under the Ombudsman’s oversight. Can the Premier guarantee Ontarians that the CEO of the new private hydro company will still be appearing on the sunshine list?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that the member opposite might have been

interested in the transit that can be built, as a result of these announcements, in Hamilton for example, and in the GTA writ large. I would have thought that she would have been quite interested in the needs of the constituents around the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, but apparently not.

Mr. Speaker, we are building. The NDP basically is saying, “Don’t build. Don’t build this province up. Don’t invest in the infrastructure that’s needed. Don’t create 20,000 jobs a year. Don’t do that. Stay stuck in ideology. Don’t look at practical solutions.”

When I talk about the activist centre, that’s what I mean: looking for the answers to the problems that are presenting themselves today, not looking back a hundred years and deciding today what we should do, based on a hundred years ago. That’s not what we’re doing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs will come to order, and is very close to being asked to withdraw. I’m not amused.

Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier says that a privatized Hydro One won’t be under the scrutiny of the Ombudsman, under Ombudsman oversight. She’s not telling us whether or not the CEO and other executives are going to be subject to the sunshine list.

Can the Premier guarantee Ontarians that the freedom-of-information act will still apply to the new privatized hydro company?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just a couple of facts that I’m sure the leader of the third party is aware of but has neglected to mention: There will be a new Hydro One ombudsman. She knows that, I think. She also knows that there is a different set of accountability measures for publicly traded companies. The CEO’s salary will be disclosed according to OSC rules. She knows that.

But I think the bottom line here is that the leader of the third party has no faith in the private sector. In fact, she made a statement to that effect. She said that she has no faith in the private sector. That is a fundamental difference between us.

I believe, and we believe, that it’s important that government partner with the private sector, that the private sector has done an enormous amount of good.

I was at an event just on the weekend that was a prime example of a private-public partnership, where a community centre is going to be built in conjunction—the city of Toronto working with the private sector. The NDP was there, and they were—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We have a watchdog at Hydro One: the Ombudsman, who looks after the interests of the public. But the Premier wants to pull his teeth.

We currently have transparency, through the sunshine list, at Hydro One. But the Premier wants to pull the shades on that.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development, come to order—second time.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We currently have accountability through freedom-of-information at Hydro One. But the Premier wants to slam the door on that accountability.

The Premier's plan will limit access to information. It will limit transparency. It will limit accountability.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Newmarket—Aurora, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It will drive rates sky-high. The Premier's plan is wrong, Speaker. Why can't she see that? When did she lose her way?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say again that I made a commitment to the people of Ontario that we would invest in them, that we would invest in the infrastructure that is needed in their communities, that we would work with them to create the conditions to bring business to this province and create jobs. That's what this is about.

What the NDP is saying is that we shouldn't make those investments, we shouldn't create those jobs and we shouldn't look for solutions.

The leader of the NDP said on April 16, "I don't have any faith whatsoever in the ... private sector." That's quite a statement, given that we, as a government and as a people, rely on the private sector. We rely on the private sector to create jobs, to innovate, to draw investment to the province. She chooses not to have any desire—or any understanding that we need to work with the private sector if we're going to thrive.

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Education. Minister, today is the second day that 24,000 students in Durham don't have classes to attend. Yesterday, you said that you were mystified, you were perplexed and you weren't sure why the board was striking. Well, you can be perplexed and mystified no longer: The reason the board is striking and the reason that for a second day 24,000 students are out of the classroom is 12 years of Liberal fiscal mismanagement.

OSSTF in Sudbury could strike on April 27, and we just found out that OSSTF Peel announced they may strike on May 4. This isn't a local issue anymore. The buck stops with the Liberal government and with you, Minister. How many more boards need to strike before you realize why they walked away from negotiations?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Obviously, we're very concerned about the students who are missing classes. We understand that students and parents want the teachers back in the classroom. The kids want to get back in the classroom—which is actually great, that students are telling us that they want to get back into their studies.

But I think it is quite important to understand that the way the collective bargaining act is structured, some issues are discussed at a provincial level. The central

table includes the crown—so yes, I am responsible for being at that table—the trustee association and the provincial union. That central table continues to have talks. Talks are going on at the central table. Unfortunately, it's at some of the local tables where talks have broken down.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Back to the minister: You said yesterday that you hadn't heard a coherent explanation as to why Durham was striking. Mr. Speaker, the member from Guelph is the Minister of Education. If she hasn't heard a coherent explanation or been given a proper briefing, I hope she spends time today interviewing new staff.

But I suppose I can save her the trouble. The strike in Durham is because of your 12 years of Liberal fiscal mismanagement. You can't negotiate fairly and you're backtracking on election promises.

Minister, will you stop blaming—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Order.

Please finish.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Minister, will you stop blaming the local boards and take responsibility before more boards strike in this province?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I—I would quibble a little bit with the wording—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Liz Sandals: —because I think it's important that we don't get into a situation of assigning blame here or blame there or blame there. What's important is that we have talks at both levels—we do have talks going on—because the only way to reach an agreement is if we're talking. We are negotiating at the central table, where I do have responsibility, and we understand that we must arrive at a negotiated agreement. But we also know that at the local level we need the local parties.

I point out that these are the people whose last platform—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier: Yesterday, Ontarians learned that they will be paying another \$70 a year on their hydro bill to pay for Liberal waste and mismanagement of the hydro system. But instead of trying to make things better and using our strategic energy assets like Hydro One to help people conserve, to help them get their bills under control, the Liberals are privatizing Hydro One and handing control over to Bay Street.

Privatization is going to drive up hydro bills, just like it's always done. The OEB just approved another rate increase starting May 1. Can the Premier tell Ontarians

how much more she expects rates to go up under her privatization plan?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

1110

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: In December 2013 we issued a long-term energy plan, Mr. Speaker. There was one page in that that had particular attention from the opposition and others: That was our projected rate increases over the next four or five years.

The reality is, we've been reducing the costs in the sector. The announcement of a rate increase yesterday is less than what was predicted, because we're getting a better handle on the sector. We're reducing our costs in the sector and we're making efforts towards the ratepayer in many other ways as well. I'll deal with that in supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again, back to the Premier: Ontarians have bills almost twice as high as people get in Manitoba and Quebec, where their public utilities are owned by the people. We are watching our rates go up faster, and what you put in place will only make it worse. The Premier hasn't learned the lesson that public hydro is more affordable. Her privatization plan is going to be bad for conservation, bad for innovation, bad for jobs, bad for business and bad for the people of Ontario.

Premier, this is a lousy plan. When are you going to pull the plug on privatization?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, we can expect a lot of rhetoric coming from the opposition parties. The reality is that the electricity prices in Ontario are lower than in three other provinces—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on, please.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: They're lower than in three other provinces. Yes, Manitoba and Quebec are lower than us because they have legacy hydro projects that enable that. In Canada, we're in the middle of the pack.

We hear them also say that we've got the highest rates in North America. They should look at Detroit, they should look at New York, and they should look at Boston where it's 18, 19, 20 cents per kilowatt hour. We are lowering the pressures on price; we are lowering that, as well, by doing what we're doing with Hydro One. It'll be more efficient in the long run; the ratepayers will be protected. Our plan is working.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. It's always a privilege for me to bring to this House issues that are of interest to my constituents in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, and one of those issues that I regularly hear about, whether it's through meetings of talking to the mayors and councillors, is connecting links.

There are two connecting links in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell: There's one in the township of Champlain and one in the town of Hawkesbury. Since the

Connecting Links program ended in 2012, many in my community have felt the financial pressure of keeping these roads in good working order and condition.

Speaker, through you: Could the minister please tell the members of this House what our government is doing to help municipalities with their connecting links?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for the question, but also for his incredibly strong advocacy for his community.

The member is 100% correct, Speaker. We have continued to hear from Ontario municipalities about the need for additional funding for their connecting links. Municipalities have told us that making connecting links projects eligible under the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund has not been sufficient. So we listened—the Premier listened, our government listened—and we have been committed to working with municipalities to address this issue. That's why I was extremely happy to be in Sault Ste. Marie yesterday, with the Minister of Government Services and the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, to formally announce that the province is committing \$15 million annually to a new Connecting Links program.

This announcement is only one part of our government's plan to unlock the value of certain public assets which will provide approximately \$4 billion to build new transit and other priority infrastructure projects—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister, for that very comprehensive response and the great announcement that you did make yesterday.

Speaker, there are 352 connecting links in Ontario and 70 bridges in 77 municipalities across the province. As I indicated earlier, two of these connecting links are found in my community, in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. But I've also heard other members in this House talk about connecting links within their riding, often discussing the difficulties their local municipalities are having keeping these roads in good shape. I know those living in my community will be very pleased to hear more about the funding being offered through the new Connecting Links program.

Speaker, through you: Can the minister tell the members of this House when Ontario municipalities can expect to start receiving funding from the new Connecting Links program?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, I thank that member for his question.

As I mentioned previously, this new program is only one part of our government's plan to unlock the value of certain public assets, making more funding available for transit and transportation projects like Connecting Links through our Moving Ontario Forward plan. This means that what was announced in April 2014 as a nearly \$29-billion investment in Moving Ontario Forward is now a \$31.5-billion commitment over the next 10 years.

Through the Moving Ontario Forward plan, Connecting Links funding is expected to begin in the spring of

2016. But we want to make sure that we get this program right, which is why we'll continue to consult with municipalities to ensure the new program meets their needs. We look forward to continuing to work with our municipal partners on this incredibly important project.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Premier. Premier, Ontario's Ombudsman's ongoing probe into Hydro One's billing fiasco is now the largest ever undertaken by his office, with more than 10,500 public complaints and an average of 10 new complaints each day still.

Residents of my riding have experienced this firsthand, with hundreds of customers, including small businesses, who have gone months without a bill only to be advised that they owe thousands and will be disconnected if they don't pay in full. Now, with your plan to sell off a majority stake in Hydro One, it will leave its customers without access to the Ontario Ombudsman's oversight.

Premier, is your government trying to run away from the accountability of the Ombudsman's oversight and another critical report on the energy file?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Energy will want to speak to the specifics, but let me just say that in fact we believe that Hydro One can be a much better run company. In the work that Ed Clark and his group did, they came to that conclusion and they believe that broadening the ownership in Hydro One and realizing the benefit of that—reinvesting in infrastructure—will be good for the people of Ontario on a number of fronts, including having a more efficient company.

But I also want to say that the announcement that was just referenced in terms of Connecting Links is part of this. I know that members opposite, particularly in the opposition, claim to have the concerns of people in small and rural communities at heart. They should be very, very supportive of a Connecting Links program because the members who come to the Good Roads conference and to ROMA talk about, over and over again, the need for infrastructure investment and connecting links. That's exactly what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Premier, you have increased the Ontario Ombudsman oversight with Bill 8, only to turn around and take it away from Hydro One.

Just last week, you announced that a beer ombudsman would be created to watch over beer sales. Premier, families in Ontario are more concerned with their lights being on than their Bud Light being cold, even though one can't really happen without the other.

We have seen this before with other scandals like Ornge and the gas plants, where oversight has been created after the fact.

Premier, will you help protect the customers of Ontario's largest electricity provider by allowing proper oversight by the Ontario Ombudsman?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The Hydro One transformation is going to take a number of months. In the meantime, there's plenty of time for the Ombudsman to report.

With respect to the work that the Ombudsman has been doing: Yes, he has received over 10,000 complaints. They're generated out of the new billing system. There are about 3,300 complaints that have been referred to Hydro One for resolution. To date, Hydro One has successfully resolved 99% of the billing complaints it received from the Ombudsman. Refunds and credits are being given and accommodation is being given to all those who have been impacted.

Right now the level of complaint is less than what has normally happened over the course of the last five, seven or 10 years.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday the Minister of Education stated that she was perplexed about the current labour dispute in Ontario's education sector. What I find truly perplexing is that the Liberal government, the Premier, is considering removing a limit on class sizes—the signature education policy of her predecessor, Dalton McGuinty—and forcing students and teachers into larger classes.

Speaker, can the Premier please explain to Ontarians why the Liberal government is flip-flopping on class sizes and throwing our schools into chaos?

1120

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes, thank you very much. Let me just repeat what I said previously. The legislation is very clear: When you have central negotiations—we're talking about money issues that have to do with money, with finances, with provincial policy. Those are the issues that are being negotiated at the central table, and there could theoretically be a central strike on central issues.

When you have a local strike—and this is clearly a local strike in Durham—it is, by definition under the law, a strike on local issues. Those would be issues like transfer and surplus.

We believe that the only way you solve this problem is to negotiate, and that's exactly what we're doing at the centre table, where we sit.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I thank the Minister of Education for that lesson. What she clearly doesn't know is that negotiations are a give-and-take, not just taking.

Again, to the Premier: Just yesterday the Minister of Education claimed that she hadn't heard a coherent explanation of what local issues prompted education workers to walk out in Durham, and that she is mystified by their actions.

Maybe if the Premier and minister actually consulted Ontario families and education workers before slashing education funding and forcing the closure of neighbourhood schools, they wouldn't be so mystified as to why Ontarians are so upset.

Speaker, when will this government finally admit that their policies of education cuts and forced school closures are failing Ontarians?

Hon. Liz Sandals: As I said, the only way to solve a labour issue—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Hon. Liz Sandals: The only way to solve a labour problem is to negotiate. We are committed to negotiating a collective agreement, and that's why, as we speak, people are sitting, negotiating, to arrive at a central agreement. That is the role that we will continue to play, because we are committed to achieving a central negotiated collective agreement.

With respect to funding, I'm sorry that the NDP doesn't think that a 56% increase in funding qualifies as an increase. They seem to think a 56% increase is a cut. I'm afraid I don't understand NDP math.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

SERVICES AUX PERSONNES AYANT UNE DÉFICIENCE INTELLECTUELLE

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Ma question est pour la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires. Minister, in the 2014 budget, this government announced a significant investment in the developmental services sector and those individuals living with developmental disabilities. However, as you are aware, il existe des pressions considérables concernant les options disponibles en matière résidentielle pour les individus vivant avec une déficience comportementale et leurs besoins résidentiels à l'extérieur de leur maison familiale.

As identified by this Legislature's select committee on developmental disabilities, there are some well-known concerns regarding the access to residential services. Moreover, the Auditor General released a report last year that noted the number of people waiting for residential supports.

Monsieur le Président, est-ce que la ministre peut nous expliquer ce que le gouvernement fait pour répondre à ces préoccupations?

L'hon. Helena Jaczek: Merci, la députée d'Ottawa-Orléans, pour la question. Le secteur des services aux personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle fait face à des pressions importantes en Ontario, en particulier les services en établissement.

As I announced last month, 525 adults have received new residential supports since budget 2014, moving toward our commitment of 1,400 new urgent residential supports over four years.

We are working with community partners in order to create a broader set of housing options for individuals with developmental disabilities. I had the opportunity to meet with my ministry's developmental services housing task force last week and discussed their progress so far.

Last month, the task force launched a call for proposals on innovative housing solutions.

I very much appreciate the work done by the housing task force and look forward to continuing to work with them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Merci, madame la Ministre. I know that organizations in my riding of Ottawa-Orléans appreciate that this government wants community partners to play an active part in finding the best solutions.

Minister, in the 2014 budget your ministry committed to timelines to eliminate existing wait-lists for people waiting for direct funding assistance. As you know, direct funding through Special Services at Home, for children until 18, and Passport, for adults, provides funding for individuals and families that can be used towards particular programming at agencies of their choice. Through these direct funding programs, this government is helping to support individual choice and encourage independence for those with developmental disabilities and their families.

Monsieur le Président, est-ce que la ministre peut partager avec cette Chambre le progrès qui est fait en ce qui a trait au financement pour répondre aux listes d'attente?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased to report that 14,000 people now have new direct funding to purchase supports and services; that is, 8,000 more children and 6,000 more adults since the 2014 budget.

I have visited many places across the province, including Ottawa, and have witnessed first-hand the need of those with developmental disabilities and the support that our front-line workers and agencies are providing.

Comme la députée d'Ottawa-Orléans l'a fait remarquer, pour les personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle, ce financement direct fournit des soutiens qui les aident à vivre de façon plus indépendante, à participer à la vie de leur collectivité et à continuer de vivre avec leur famille. Notre gouvernement ne ménage pas ses efforts pour faire de l'Ontario un endroit plus inclusif pour les personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle. Merci, monsieur le Président.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Minister, I've been asking for the release of the special purpose account for over three years now. Legislation in this House would state that it must be tabled yearly. The SPA is generated from the fees collected from the hunters and anglers of this province, supposedly to be reinvested in resource management.

Your government insists that the SPA fund is decreasing. However, we cannot verify that assertion because you refuse to table the document. Hunters and anglers are facing increased fees and new service fees, and seniors may now have to purchase a fishing licence.

Minister, will you show some transparency and table the documents today?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I thank the member for the question. I do believe at least two of the reports that the particular member is referencing have been tabled. I'll double-check, but I'm pretty sure two have been tabled. There is one yet to come. I've been happy to make that offer of information that he's been looking for for some time available to him.

Speaker, in regard to the fees that the member continues to raise in this House, there was a significant consultation that was undertaken one or two years ago. Through that process, there were a variety of suggestions that came in through the consultation on what we needed to do to continue to keep the SPA whole. Many of those recommendations were dismissed.

The member keeps flying the attitude about a seniors' licence fee coming in. I've very publicly stated on a number of occasions that that was suggested through the consultation. It's not something that I have ever contemplated doing. I've said that in here before and I say it in here again, so the member perhaps, in his next supplementary or in the future, won't feel the need to reference a seniors' licencing issue on the SPA in this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the minister: I will continually talk about that because we don't believe you on this side of the House.

Minister, you're increasing new fees, you're increasing the price of licences in this province and you're still behind in tabling the documents to this Legislature. I find it really interesting that the Out of Doors magazine is able to have information on this current SPA fund—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are a few on the edge, here.

Please finish.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker.

I find it interesting the Out of Doors magazine has information on the SPA fund that has yet to be tabled in this Legislature. Minister, I find that quite disrespectful to this chamber as a whole. Are you trying to manipulate the public by releasing snippets of incomplete information? You obviously do have the reports prepared. Why won't you release them in totality? What are you hiding from the people of Ontario?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, come to order.
Minister.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, the SPA has approximately \$100 million a year in it; \$66 million of that comes from the licensing and fees that come into the ministry. It's a dedicated account that goes towards fish and wildlife management in the province of Ontario.

1130

By way of example, in the MNRF's Aylmer district, which I think is the member's riding, planned spending is \$873,000 on fish and wildlife management projects and

\$520,000 on enforcement in the 2014-15 year, all from the SPA.

As well, out of the SPA, we have been flying moose aerial inventories in the province of Ontario—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It goes both ways. The member from Elgin—Middlesex—London, you asked. Listen.

Carry on.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Almost every wildlife management unit in the province of Ontario has now been flown over the course of the last two or three years, to determine what the moose population numbers are.

We're taking the SPA money and we're using it for what it was intended to do. It's creating the databases upon which we can make reliable decisions on behalf of fishermen and hunters—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. A new study by two York University professors confirms what New Democrats have been saying all along: Auto insurance companies are making record profits while Ontario families are paying the highest auto insurance premiums in the country. In 2013 alone, Ontarians were overcharged for auto insurance by an estimated \$840 million. This is absolutely unacceptable.

The Liberal government has the ability to reduce premiums. However, time and time again, what they're doing instead is giving more and more profits to insurance companies. They're breaking their promise. The Liberal government had said very clearly—they promised to reduce auto insurance by 15%. But instead, they haven't even delivered half of that.

This is again another broken promise. Enough is enough. Will this government, in the upcoming budget, commit to following through on their promise?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Congratulations on being deputy of the New Democratic party. The man has delivered his very first question.

Interjections.

Hon. Charles Sousa: And now, as deputy leader of the NDP, I expect you to support the resolutions and the work we're doing to lower auto insurance rates going forward.

Let us not get back to what you did before, and that was delay what was necessary to bring these rates down. We postponed legislation that was required. That delay has, as a result, delayed the opportunity for us to lower still the costs. As a result, work that has been done is now transforming into lower costs.

Now we're halfway there. We need to get all the way there—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I stand; you sit.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, you have sight.

Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: What we did is, we didn't support—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's enough. The deputy House leader is warned.

Carry on.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

New data from the Financial Services Commission of Ontario shows very clearly that the Liberal government are dragging their feet to support drivers in Ontario, yet they move so quickly to put more profits in the pockets of insurance companies.

The government has said that reducing auto insurance is a part of their economic plan for Ontarians, and that rates are coming down—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Natural Resources, come to order.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh:—but when we speak to people, we know that the rates aren't coming down. People are instead seeing their rates go up.

How is it possible that this government has been allowing insurance companies—individual ones—to increase their rates instead of bringing those down?

Two years ago, this government made a promise, and they've broken that promise. When will we see real action on this file? When will we see the government actually commit to reducing auto insurance by 15%?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Auto insurance rates must go down by cutting costs. As a result, we've taken actions to reduce the costs of claims.

It is true: Ontario costs of claims are far higher than they are in other provinces of Canada. Some of them require some tough decisions. We hope that the NDP will support some of the legislation, some of the work we're doing, to find ways to reduce costs.

We also know that there are a number of companies now that have reduced their rates by more than 15% already. We know that, working together with the competitive market that exists, we could further some of those reductions, but we need support from the NDP on this. I'm looking at you. I'm hoping that they'll look at you as well, recognizing that together we can get it done. This budget will enable us to do that. I look to them to support it as we go forward.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: My question this morning is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Our government recognizes that the wealth of natural resources found in northern Ontario is vital to our northern economy. Forest harvesting and milling, as well

as mineral production and processing, are an incredibly important part of my community of Sudbury and continue to be pathways to prosperity for all northerners.

In 2014, the total number of direct jobs in mineral production was 26,000, with an additional 50,000 jobs associated with manufacturing and processing.

The forestry sector currently provides over 170,000 direct and indirect jobs in over 260 communities.

Can the minister please share the details of the recent Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program and how it will continue to ensure a stable business climate and protect jobs in northern Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I appreciate the question from the MPP from Sudbury.

We know that the best way to protect jobs for northerners is to ensure that northern Ontario remains a destination where major mining, forestry and manufacturing companies choose to do business. That certainly was one of the reasons why we were so pleased to introduce the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program back in 2010. This is a program designed to assist northern Ontario's major industrial electricity consumers to reduce their electricity costs and create and sustain jobs, maintaining global competitiveness.

That's why I was so excited, two weeks ago, alongside my colleagues the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services and the MPP for Sudbury, to announce an ongoing \$120-million commitment to investment in the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program. We have heard loud and clear that the program has helped position Ontario as an attractive destination for investment, and we look forward to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: I'd like to thank the minister for that response. We know that the cost and supply of electricity is a major consideration for companies when they choose where to operate.

This program continues to receive positive feedback across the north. We heard the president of the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities state that this support is "maintaining global competitiveness and helping to sustain local jobs." The Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association has also expressed that this is great news for industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, can the minister outline what the benefits are to companies operating under the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you again to the member for the question. This program is part of Premier Wynne and our government's commitment to support the north and build a very strong economy across the province. We just heard about the Connecting Links program and the \$50-million commitment by the Minister of Transportation—another piece of that commitment.

Since launching the industrial electricity rate program in 2010, we have demonstrated that it can reduce industrial electricity rates, on average, by up to 25%, and

industry is certainly telling us the same thing. Richard Garneau, Resolute Forest Products' CEO and president, said that the program is "a cornerstone of the electricity program in northern Ontario." Goldcorp's Bill Gascon said, "It reduces our costs significantly on our site." Marc Boissonneault of Glencore said that the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program is one of the puzzle pieces that will determine the company's future in Sudbury.

We are very proud of this program—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PETITIONS

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier today. Premier, for over two years, the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly has been reviewing and debating electronic petitions. The mandate is simple—not whether we should change the role of petitions; just simply whether we should allow online petitions in this House—and yet for two years, despite countless research and presentations by the Clerk as well as by expert witnesses, the government committee members have ragged the puck.

Last week at committee, the member for Scarborough–Rouge River gave us our greatest insight as to why the government won't move forward. He said, "The worst thing governments do ... is give people hope." Premier, is your government preventing electronic petitions in this Legislative Assembly because you fear that they give people hope?

1140

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I appreciate the question.

I think we all know very clearly that this government stands for accountability and transparency. The amount of work we have done in terms of Bill 8 to ensure that government is more open, more accountable and transparent to the people of Ontario is exemplary—not to mention the work that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Lanark will come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: —not to mention the work that the Open Government panel has done in regard to opening up the government, making sure that there's more information that's available to Ontarians, that there is access to open data. It all speaks to ensuring that people have more information available.

The committee is looking into the matter, and we respect their deliberation in this matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It looks like the House leader likes to rag the puck as well.

Premier, we've heard from expert witnesses that all three caucuses have the ability to implement electronic petitions immediately. That's because members from all

three caucuses already use electronic petitions. We have the opportunity to finally take a step forward to modernize this Legislature.

Premier, will you commit to this House that your government will move forward, and not rag the puck, and allow electronic petitions, or do you really share the member for Scarborough–Rouge River's opinion that the worst thing government can do is give people hope?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: My understanding is that in the committee there has only been only one deputation thus far, and that so-called expert is a staff person of the member opposite who's asking the question. I don't think that really qualifies him as an expert on e-petitions.

We task members of the committee to do important work on behalf of this Legislature and of their constituents. This is an important issue. This government is very much open to ensuring that government is open, that there is more data that is available. If electronic petitions is something that the committee wants to explore, we should let them do their work, to hear from experts, to look at other jurisdictions, as to what the mechanism would be. I think we should not be second-guessing or doubting the members of the committee for the important work they do in the committee. I thank them for the work they have been doing on this very important issue.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Prior to the election, the Premier promised Ontarians that within 10 years she would deliver train service every 15 minutes on all GO lines. She promised Kitchener, Guelph and Brampton that they would see all-day, two-way service every 15 minutes within five years. But on Friday, the government drastically cut these transit plans. Instead of 15-minute service, people in Barrie and Newmarket will get 60-minute service. Instead of all-day, two-way service every 15 minutes, Kitchener, Guelph and Brampton will get peak-hour, peak-direction service every 30 minutes.

This government promised funding for rapid transit projects in Hamilton, Brampton and Durham, for a Toronto relief line, for the Yonge subway extension, and on and on. Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's not often in this House that I have the opportunity to stand and speak so proudly with a set-up like that from that particular member.

Last Friday in Barrie, I was very proud to stand alongside the Premier as she announced that over the next decade this government will invest \$13.5 billion in transforming the GO Transit network. What we talked about that day means that there will be more than a doubling of peak service and a quadrupling of off-peak service compared to where we stand today, reduced journey times for some cross-region transit trips across

this network and a much wider range of travel options right across the GTHA.

Just this morning, I stood alongside so many members and caucus colleagues from Peel region to announce the province's commitment to build the \$1.6-billion Hurontario-Main LRT that will run from Mississauga to Brampton.

That's the job that we're doing. We're going to keep building Ontario up. Get on board and join us.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

DEFERRED VOTES

POOLED REGISTERED PENSION PLANS ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LES RÉGIMES DE PENSION AGRÉÉS COLLECTIFS

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 57, Loi créant un cadre pour les régimes de pension agréés collectifs et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1146 to 1151.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On March 25, Mr. Sousa moved second reading of Bill 57.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Anderson, Granville
Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Baker, Yvan
Balkissoon, Bas
Ballard, Chris
Barrett, Toby
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bradley, James J.
Chiarelli, Bob
Clark, Steve
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad
Dunlop, Garfield
Hardeman, Ernie
Hillier, Randy
Hoggarth, Ann
Hoskins, Eric
Hudak, Tim
Hunter, Mitzie
Jaczek, Helena
Jones, Sylvia
Kiwala, Sophie
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
MacCharles, Tracy
MacLeod, Lisa
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Marlow, Gila
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted

Munro, Julia
Murray, Glen R.
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Naqvi, Yasir
Nicholls, Rick
Pettapiece, Randy
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Todd
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Thibeault, Glenn
Thompson, Lisa M.
Vernile, Daiane
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.

Fedeli, Victor
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fraser, John
Gravelle, Michael

Meilleur, Madeleine
Mlyncyn, Peter Z.
Miller, Norm
Moridi, Reza

Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Fife, Catherine
Forster, Cindy
French, Jennifer K.

Gates, Wayne
Gélinas, France
Gretzky, Lisa
Hatfield, Percy
Horwath, Andrea
Mantha, Michael

Miller, Paul
Sattler, Peggy
Singh, Jagmeet
Tabuns, Peter
Vanthof, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 77; the nays are 17.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 16, the bill is ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

Mr. Steve Clark: A point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: A point of order: In his response to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, the government House leader, I believe, impugned motive against an expert witness. It should be our three parties' choice who our expert witness is. The government House leader should not impugn anyone that we decide will come and appear before a committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I appreciate the member's point of order. It is only a point of order when another member is impugned.

There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1155 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, Allah-u-Abha. Today is the first day of the festival of Ridvan. I have a number of members of the Baha'i community visiting us today. Please join me in welcoming members of the Baha'i community of the greater Toronto area.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Randy Hillier: With each passing election, we see an ever-decreasing amount of political participation at all levels of government. One of the main contributing factors cited by non-voters in their decision to not participate in elections is their belief that politicians simply pander to the electorate around election time and are not held accountable for their words or actions through their four-year tenure. Who can blame them when parties campaign on actions such as no cuts and a

balanced budget, only to find, a few months later, deep cuts and increased public debt?

My solution to this issue comes in the form of my legislation entitled the Election Amendment Act (MPPs' Recall), 2015, which I will be debating on May 7.

The purpose of this legislation is to give the people of Ontario a tool to keep their elected officials accountable, by giving constituents the power to trigger a by-election when they feel their elected official no longer represents their interests, rather than having to wait for the next election.

I believe that with the electorate empowered in this way, we would see a rise in people encouraged to participate in our democratic process, while simultaneously making the democratic process more direct, more responsible and stronger, and restoring much-needed integrity to this province's political system.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Cindy Forster: Today I stand in solidarity with members of OPSEU Local 294 in my riding of Welland and the ridings of fellow MPPs in the Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand and Brant (HNHB) region. These members have been on strike for 12 days.

My inbox has been flooded with emails from many of the constituents who are patients, or families of patients, who have come to depend on nurses for the irreplaceable health services they deliver day in and day out.

Donna Fobert, who suffers from a destroyed skull plate from a brain tumour, describes them not as nurses but as family. She fully supports their right to a fair and quality work environment, and would be on the picket line with them if she physically could. She says nobody wins when nurses cannot do their jobs, and ultimately, it's patients like her who are suffering the most. Donna is one of the 1,600 patients affected by this dispute.

The CCAC, responsible for contracting the work to the for-profit CarePartners, is a publicly funded agency, but there has not been a peep from this Liberal government about ensuring that the hard-working health care professionals and support staff are treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve.

I stand today to request that the Minister of Labour urge CarePartners, a for-profit agency, to put patient care before profits and ensure that patients go back to receiving the care that they need in the immediate future.

MILTON TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to rise today to tell you about a great charitable organization in Halton. Halton is one of the fastest-growing and most affluent communities in the province, and I can't think of a better place to live, work or raise a family. But we still have too many residents who face significant difficulties making ends meet in their day-to-day lives. These residents need a lifeline, a helping hand, to keep them in a warm home.

Since 2011, Milton Transitional Housing has been that lifeline. In fact, recently I attended a fundraiser, the Coldest Night of the Year, and also the Empty Bowls fundraiser, where they hold events to raise funds for this very important cause.

For years this dedicated group has worked tirelessly to build bridges between the short-term emergency shelter system and long-term affordable housing. They do an incredible job in building our community up and making sure that our neighbours don't fall through the cracks.

That's why I was so pleased to announce last Friday that Milton Transitional Housing had received a three-year, \$218,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant. This funding will allow the organization to grow its staff, expand support services and provide greater access to affordable transitional housing in Milton by more than tripling the number of housing units from three to 10.

Nobody in Halton or this province should ever have to live without a stable roof over his or her head. Milton Transitional Housing provides more than just a roof over their heads; they provide a compassionate, human connection to those facing difficult times.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I want to share today some of the repercussions of this Liberal government's mismanaged energy file, in particular the Green Energy Act and the consequence that this act has had in my riding and possibly across the province.

The Green Energy Act was introduced in 2009 and since then it has wreaked havoc across Ontario. It has increased all homeowners' yearly bills by \$1,100. It has torn communities apart. Really, Speaker, it has been nothing more than an absolute disaster.

I want to refer to a release that I received earlier this week where it says "Wind Leaseholders May Be on the Hook for Billions."

It goes on to read: A recent visit to the registry office in Goderich, ServiceOntario, has received or revealed that a registration of \$1 billion—I'll repeat this: "A ... visit ... to the ... registry office in Goderich ... has revealed the registration of ... \$1 billion ... by" a wind company on approximately "100 wind leaseholder properties in Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh.... Certified public records indicate that some properties may be encumbered at 20 times" more than "their farmland value, or more."

This is of grave concern. I ask today if the Liberals really anticipated the results of their poor decisions back in 2009. It's time they repealed this Green Energy Act and the disaster that it's wreaked across this province.

LEADING WOMEN, LEADING GIRLS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last Friday I hosted a celebration for the seven women and girls honoured this year by the Leading Women, Leading Girls, Building Communities recognition program in Kitchener-Waterloo.

Melanie Baker was a core organizer behind Voices Carry, an event which raised \$10,000 for women in crisis in response to Bill Cosby's appearance in Kitchener.

Georgia Cunningham is a vice-president of S.G. Cunningham and mentors other women in construction while donating her time to numerous causes and fundraisers.

Karley George is a writer, producer and director who made a point to hire women for traditionally male technical roles when producing her play Fool's Paradise.

Sarah Ingle is a We Day ambassador, student council and model UN member and was recognized for her potential by BlackBerry's Build a Village awards program.

Janice Lee is the city of Kitchener's 2015 Artist in Residence. She founded KW Poetry Slam, chaired Rainbow Reels queer film festival and runs workshops teaching girls to express themselves through poetry.

Fauzia Mazhar is the founder and chair of the Coalition of Muslim Women, KW, which has grown to include over 100 active volunteers. She works tirelessly to encourage other women as they become community leaders.

Kirsten Pendlebury is the founder of the Female Equality Matters club at her school, which fosters a passion for social justice and gender equity among her peers.

I would like to congratulate all the leading women and leading girls, recognize and thank them for the work they do to speak up, speak out and, as Janice said on Friday, live a life with dignity and integrity. It was a pleasure to honour them in my community.

BAHA'I COMMUNITY

Mr. Chris Ballard: Today I rise in the House to say Allah-u-Abha and, joined by my colleague Reza Moridi, MPP for Richmond Hill, to wish the people of the Baha'i faith a happy Ridvan.

Ridvan is a 12-day religious festival and is one of the most important celebrations of the Baha'i faith. Often referred to as the "king of festivals," it takes its name from the Garden of Ridvan located near Baghdad, Iraq. The site is historically significant as it's where Baha'u'llah, the faith founder, spent 12 days prior to his religious journey to Istanbul before declaring that he was a divine messenger in 1863.

1510

Beginning at sunset April 20 until sunset of May 2, followers of the Baha'i faith honour the 12 days that Baha'ullah spent in the Garden of Ridvan by celebrating spring and renewal of spirituality. There are approximately 35,000 Baha'i living in Canada, with more than half of them living here in Ontario. In York region, which includes the great ridings of Newmarket-Aurora and Richmond Hill, more than 2,200 individuals practise the Baha'i faith and are celebrating the festival of Ridvan.

I would like to wish everybody celebrating this 12-day religious festival a happy Ridvan, including the residents of Newmarket-Aurora who celebrate this festival, particularly Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey and Farzaneh Peterson,

members of the Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is of Newmarket, who are here with us today.

JASON PETTAPIECE

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Today I am pleased to recognize my nephew, Jason Pettapiece. Jason is an avid runner, and, yesterday, he competed in the prestigious Boston Marathon. He completed the marathon in three hours, 22 minutes and 51 seconds. This is an outstanding accomplishment. We are all so proud of his fine finish and for all the work he has put in to make it to this point.

Perth-Wellington was well represented at this year's Boston Marathon. Local racers included Matt Feltham, Ercole Guidi, Julee Nickel, Pete Wilson and Tammy Storey.

I would like to congratulate everyone who participated in the 2015 Boston Marathon. Again, I would like to congratulate my nephew, Jason, on his remarkable accomplishment.

POLISH COMMUNITY

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I rise in the House today to commemorate and remember those lost in the Katyn massacre of April 1940. The Katyn massacre was the mass execution of 20,000 Polish military officers by the Soviet Union during World War II. For the people of Poland, Katyn is a symbol of the criminal policy of the Soviet system against the Polish nation.

After Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union concluded their non-aggression pact of 1939 and Germany invaded Poland from the west, Soviet forces occupied the eastern half of Poland. As part of this occupation, 20,000 Polish military personnel fell into Soviet hands and were interned in prison camps inside the Soviet Union. However, when the Polish government in exile requested that the Polish military personnel be released in order to fight the Nazis, the Soviets said they couldn't be found. The fate of these missing prisoners remained a mystery until the Germans found the mass graves in 1943.

This crime against the Polish nation decimated the ranks of the Polish military, the ruling class and its intelligentsia. Soviet leaders insisted for decades the Polish officers found at Katyn had been killed by the invading Germans. It wasn't until 2000 that Russia admitted that the Soviet Union was responsible for this crime.

Mr. Speaker, today I stand with the families and the victims of Katyn, including my own family—having lost two great-uncles there—as well as with all Polish people who still feel the haunting cloud of this atrocity. We shall remember them.

SHOW CHOIR CANADA CHAMPIONSHIPS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I have a very inspiring story I want to share with you from my riding of Kitchener Centre. It involves a group of talented young people who

won big at a recent national singing competition called the fifth annual Show Choir Canada Championship.

The KW Glee club was one of this year's 14 competitors. According to their artistic director Amanda Kind, KW Glee was definitely the underdog. While their competitors were costumed in a sea of sparkles, the KW Glee ensemble was not, as many of youth in the 72-member choir simply couldn't afford the flashy costumes. Instead, the students wore their own clothes and called it the "urban look". The theme of their performance was called School of Pop. The songs they belted out over 20 minutes included Pop 101, Uptown Funk, and Shake It Out. I can't say that I know any of these songs, but I'm sure it was fabulous.

It was clear that the audience and the judges were evaluating based on substance rather than sequins. On hearing their names called as the first-place winners, the young singers fell to the ground with relief, noting that this was a "wow" moment in life. In addition to winning a big trophy, KW Glee also received a gift certificate from Yamaha, which will help them buy microphones and other equipment.

I'm so proud of KW Glee's much-deserved title of grand champions, and I look forward to many more creative performances in the coming years.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated April 21, 2015, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ELECTION AMENDMENT ACT (MPPS' RECALL), 2015

LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LA LOI ÉLECTORALE (RÉVOCATION DES DÉPUTÉS)

Mr. Hillier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to amend the Election Act with respect to the recall of members of the Legislative Assembly /
Projet de loi 89, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale en ce qui concerne la révocation des députés à l'Assemblée législative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Randy Hillier: This bill amends the Election Act to provide a process by which a member of the Legislative Assembly may be recalled and a by-election held to fill the vacant seat.

An eligible voter in a member's electoral district can apply to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issuance of a recall petition. No application for the issuance of a recall petition may be made during the year following a member's election or one year before the next scheduled general election.

A proponent of a recall petition has 60 days to return the petition to the Chief Electoral Officer with the signatures of eligible voters in the electoral district who represent at least 25% of the total number of voters who voted in the last election held in the district.

In that case, the seat of the member in the assembly becomes vacant. A by-election is then held to fill the vacancy. The recalled member is free to be a candidate in that by-election.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Children and Youth Services is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Minister?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item number 48 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister moves that notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice of ballot item number 48 be waived. Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

CURRICULUM

Mr. Monte McNaughton: This is the first day that I'll be presenting a series of petitions entitled "Demand-

ing Public Input to the Sex Ed Content of the 'Grade 1-8 Health and Physical Education Curriculum.'

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas in 2010 the people of Ontario rejected the sensitive, graphic, age-inappropriate sex education content contained in the 2010"—

Interjections.

1520

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. I find it unique that I have to remind members not to heckle during petitions.

Carry on, please.

Mr. Monte McNaughton:—"grade 1-8 health and physical education curriculum;

"Whereas, in 2010, the government responded to the public concerns by removing the sensitive, graphic and age-inappropriate content, and promised to provide 'opportunities for parents to lend shape to a (sex ed) policy'" (Premier McGuinty, April 22, 2010);

"Whereas parents and the public at large have not been granted opportunity to provide input into the content of the proposed curriculum;

"Whereas the government survey process did not allow for broad public input, limiting input to one hand-picked representative per school;

"Whereas the government has announced they will fully implement a revised curriculum in September 2015;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to honour the 2010 promise to 'provide opportunities for parents to lend shape to a (sex ed) policy,' prior to implementation of said curriculum, by providing:

"(a) a four-month public response time;

"(b) opportunities for parents, and the public at large, to understand, and effectively respond in a way that shapes the said curriculum."

I fully support this, Speaker, and affix my name to it.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: I have a petition here that was started by Val Kennedy from Englehart, Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas northern Ontario communities are connected across long distances by bus service; and

"Whereas the ONTC bus service is the only form of public transportation available to many northern Ontario residents; and

"Whereas reduction of customer service and the closure of stations will cause deterioration of the overall system of public transportation of passengers and goods in northeastern Ontario; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario committed to providing enhanced bus service to alleviate the loss of the ONTC passenger rail service;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Ontario Northland Transportation Commission bus service must be enhanced to ensure reliable and continuous accessibility including uniform provision of adequate public transportation for all communities and people of northern Ontario."

I wholeheartedly agree, and send it down with page Abdullah.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with the petition, affix my name and give it to page Ethan to bring forward.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here, again, that was presented by Community Living Tillsonburg and People First Tillsonburg.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the \$100 ODSP Work-Related Benefit provides a critically important source of funds to people with disabilities on ODSP who work, giving them the ability to pay for much-needed, ongoing work-related expenses such as transportation, clothing, food, personal care and hygiene items, and child care; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Community and Social Services plans to eliminate the Work-Related Benefit as part of a restructuring of OW and ODSP employment benefits, and has said that ongoing work-related expenses will not be covered by its new restructured Employment-Related Benefit; and

"Whereas eliminating the Work-Related Benefit will take approximately \$36 million annually out of the pockets of people with disabilities on ODSP who work; and

"Whereas a survey conducted by the ODSP Action Coalition between December 2014 and February 2015 shows that 18% of respondents who currently receive the Work-Related Benefit fear having to quit their jobs as a result of the loss of this important source of funds; 12.5% fear having to reduce the amount of money they spend on food, or rely on food banks; and 10% fear losing the ability to travel, due to the cost of transportation; and

"Whereas people receiving ODSP already struggle to get by, and incomes on ODSP provide them with little or no ability to cover these costs from regular benefits; and

"Whereas undermining employment among ODSP recipients would run directly counter to the ministry's goal of increasing employment and the provincial government's poverty reduction goal of increasing income security;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the provincial government's plan to eliminate the ODSP Work-Related Benefit."

I affix my signature, as I agree with this petition.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank Mr. Robert Melcher, who presented me with many signatures on this petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a motion was introduced at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads 'that in the opinion of the House, the operation of off-road vehicles on highways under regulation 316/03 be changed to include side-by-side off-road vehicles, four-seat side-by-side vehicles, and two-up vehicles in order for them to be driven on highways under the same conditions as other off-road/all-terrain vehicles';

"Whereas this motion was passed on November 7, 2013, to amend the Highway Traffic Act 316/03;

"Whereas the economic benefits will have positive impacts on ATV clubs, ATV manufacturers, dealers and rental shops, and will boost revenues to communities promoting this outdoor activity;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We call on the Ministry of Transportation to implement this regulation immediately."

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and present it to page Ashton to bring it down to the Clerks' table.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further petitions? The member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you for the recognition, Speaker. I have a petition here for community school busing.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario spends nearly \$1 billion per year on student transportation; and

"Whereas 'community enterprise' could deliver the same or better service with surplus revenues being reinvested in education; and

"Whereas active participation of communities can be achieved by mobilizing 'community enterprises' to provide the service. This model provides a very high ROI for Ontarians by making certain that any surplus revenues are reinvested in education;

"Whereas a community enterprise act is necessary to overcome the hurdles to mobilization of community enterprises for student transportation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario consider the need for a community enterprise act to help facilitate the mobilization of communities and financial resources for the purpose of developing community enterprises for student transportation and other undertakings."

I agree with the petition and leave it with page Ethan.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"In light of the many wide-ranging concerns being raised by Ontario citizens and 80-plus action groups across Ontario and the irrefutable international evidence of a flawed technology, health concerns, environmental effects, bird and bat kills, property losses, the tearing apart of families, friends and communities, and unprecedented costs;

"We, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to declare an Ontario-wide moratorium on the development of wind farms."

I totally agree with this petition. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Ishika.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: J'ai une pétition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital."

I fully agree with this petition. I will affix my name and give it to Joshua to bring up to the desk.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I have a petition entitled "Elimination of Microbeads from Cosmetic Products.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas microbeads are tiny plastics less than one millimetre in diameter which pass through our water filtration systems and get into our rivers and the Great Lakes; and

"Whereas these microbeads represent a growing presence in our Great Lakes and are contributing to the plastic pollution of our freshwater lakes and rivers; and

"Whereas the scientific research and data collected to date has shown that microbeads that get into our water system collect toxins and organisms mistake these microbeads for food and these microbeads can move up our food chain;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Mandate the Ontario government to ban the creation and addition of microbeads to cosmetic products and all other related health and beauty products; and

"The Ministry of the Environment conduct an annual study of the Great Lakes analyzing the waters for the presence of microbeads."

I support this petition, affix my signature to it and hand it to page Jae Min.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Mr. Todd Smith: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

"Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

"Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners' Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and to instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types."

I agree with this and will send it to the table with page Misha.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Rita Boudreault for adding to this petition. It reads as follows: 1530

"Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning ... a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients...; and

"Whereas" since "October 2009, insured PET scans" are "performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with" Health Sciences North, "its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through" Health Sciences North, "thereby serving and providing equitable access to the" residents of the northeast.

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Joshua to bring it to the Clerk.

LEGAL AID

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: "Whereas Mississauga Community Legal Services provides free legal services to legal aid clients within a community of nearly 800,000 population; and

"Whereas legal services in communities like Toronto and Hamilton serve, per capita, fewer people living in poverty, are better staffed and better funded; and

"Whereas Mississauga and Brampton have made progress in having Ontario provide funding for human services on a fair and equitable, population-based model;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of the Attorney General revise the current distribution of allocated funds in the 2012-13 budget, and adopt a population-based model, factoring in population growth rates to ensure Ontario funds are allocated in an efficient, fair and effective manner."

I agree with this petition and I will give it to page Joshua to bring to the Clerk.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of its professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process for establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct the Ontario public health system and OHIP to include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians."

I totally agree with this petition, and I'll affix my name and send it to the desk with Samantha.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Michael Mantha: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the customers of Algoma Power, are being charged astronomical costs referred to as 'delivery fees';

"Whereas we, the customers of Algoma Power, would like the 'delivery fees' looked into and regulated so as to protect the consumer from big businesses gouging the consumer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Stop Algoma Power's influx of fees for delivery and stop the onset of increasing these fees another 40% within four years."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and present it to page Joshua to bring it down to the Clerk's table.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have another petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with the petition, affix my name and give it to page Ryan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank all members for their petitions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. James J. Bradley: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 80, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animals for Research Act with respect to the possession and breeding of orcas and administrative requirements for animal care, when the bill is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy; and,

That the Standing Committee on Social Policy be authorized to meet on Monday, May 11, 2015, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and

That the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 80:

—notice of public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire; and

—witnesses are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis; and

—each witness will receive up to five minutes for their presentation, followed by nine minutes for questions from committee members; and

—the deadline for written submissions is 6 p.m. on Monday, May 11, 2015; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 2 p.m. on Thursday, May 14, 2015; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Monday, May 25, 2015, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill;

On Monday, May 25, 2015, at 4 p.m., those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the Committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Tuesday, May 26, 2015. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called that same day; and

That, when the order for third reading of the bill is called, two hours of debate shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

The votes on second and third reading may be deferred, pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 20.

Mr. Bradley.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It is my honour to speak in favour of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act, 2015. As has been discussed over the course of, well, seven hours of debate,

the bill amends the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and makes related amendments to the Animals for Research Act. These amendments, if passed by the House, will prohibit the future possession or breeding of orcas anywhere in Ontario. It would also enable a framework for animal welfare committees which would ensure planning, protection and oversight of animal care. This includes access to veterinarians with expertise in marine mammals and enhanced record-keeping.

Marine mammals are complex animals, and our government cares very deeply for the welfare of these magnificent and complex creatures. It has been while looking closely at this issue and developing new standards of care that we concluded that orcas, sometimes referred to as killer whales, should be treated differently than beluga whales and dolphins.

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Mr. Speaker, as such, our proposed amendments to the OSPCA Act would immediately prohibit possession and breeding of orcas in Ontario. The people of Ontario demand high standards of care for animals anywhere in the province, regardless of their habitat.

With these amendments, our government is taking the next big step on stronger protections for marine mammals to ensure that these unique and complex animals receive the best possible treatment and care. These amendments build on our government's ongoing efforts to have and maintain the strongest animal protection laws in Canada.

I know there's a lot of support for members of all sides of the House. On April 13, the PC member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, Mr. Miller, said the following: "I see that a poll was conducted in the Toronto Sun, March 23, 2015, and 89% of respondents agreed that Ontario should ban the importation of killer whales. I think that's probably generally supported, as it seems to be in the general public."

The member from Sarnia—Lambton is quoted as saying the following: "I will be supporting Bill 80 at second reading. I believe that the work that Dr. Rosen's committee has done is very thorough and that their suggestions form the basis for sound decision-making in moving forward."

The NDP member for Parkdale—High Park said the following: "Let's listen to the Rosen report and the recommendations therein, because they're good ones, and let's now finally put them into place, quickly."

The member for Kitchener—Waterloo has been supportive of the bill as well and has encouraged this government to pass it as quickly as possible. This is what the member for Kitchener—Waterloo had to say: "This piece of legislation, if passed—and by all accounts it will be; who could really vote against it?—should be fast-tracked. We should get it done."

I urge all my colleagues in the House to swiftly pass this legislation. In the last Parliament, the Legislature essentially ground to a halt and was not able to move forward as expeditiously as I think most people in the

province would want it to. Only 39% of government bills were passed in the last minority Parliament. That's a very low level of passage. That's compared to more than three quarters of bills that were passed, going back to 1990.

Voters of Ontario really sent a substantially clear message last June. They wanted our government to get on with the business of governing in their best interests.

There has been considerable debate on this bill. We have heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives, and they've been very valuable, in my view, to this debate. It is time we ended second reading and referred the bill to committee, where a lot of people think the real work happens to take place.

At the same time, the House can move to substantive debate on other matters. There are a number of important pieces of legislation that have already been introduced which the government would like to debate in the House and move through the legislative process. Examples that I know you'd like to hear: Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 9, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act; Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act; Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act; Bill 66, the Great Lakes Protection Act; Bill 73, the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act; and Bill 85, the Strengthening and Improving Government Act.

We'd like to spend time debating some of the other important pieces of legislation currently before the House. We are unable to do so until Bill 80 is dealt with, and that is why I urge all members to proceed with it. That is why we have this motion before the House.

I can remember, as an opposition House leader, that from time to time the opposition, when I was there, would speak perhaps longer than it had to on some of the bills. It was alleged then by the government House leaders of the day from the Conservative Party that it was simply a stalling tactic. I cannot confess to that. It may have been other members who were involved in that. I don't ever recall being involved in that myself.

What we have here is a piece of legislation which, in principle, seems to have the approval of all members of the House. I'm one who happens to believe that where there are more contentious pieces of legislation, debate should go on for a longer period of time and committees should sit for a longer period of time, both to allow public input and for amendments and that where there is, in fact, pretty good consensus in the House, we should move forward.

So far, we've heard a lot of support for this bill but we've not seen the bill moving forward as I think most members, in their heart of hearts, would really like to see happen. So I'm helping them out with their heart of hearts by providing this particular motion to the House, which I am confident will be supported by the whip of the Conservative Party and certainly by members of the New Democratic Party as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the deputy House leader. Further debate.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I say to my friend from St. Catharines, that old expression, who are you and what happened to Jim Bradley in this last little while?

I enjoyed the minister's speech and the expression on his face while he was delivering the speech.

Speaker, I was one who didn't have an opportunity to speak to Bill 80 because of the time allocation motions. I regret that I'm speaking belatedly through a time allocation motion, but I nonetheless want to devote my comments to Bill 80 and express my concerns about the bill and what we like about an approach to enhance animal welfare and safety in the province in Ontario. But let's do so, and my point of view as a member of the assembly has been to do so, on a basis related to science and expertise, not emotion or political opportunism. That's what I worry about in this bill.

I know my colleague the talented and handsome member for Chatham-Kent-Essex has spoken on this bill. You may have paid close attention to that speech a while ago. It outlined, I think, in a comprehensive fashion the concerns that we have about the bill, the history around this. I'll probably repeat some of those points, but in the interest of time I'll try to be relatively brief.

Look, Speaker, I think we always have to be cautious in this chamber when we're intervening in legitimate choice by individuals, families and businesses to operate. Marineland and other aquariums, in my view, are a legitimate choice for entertainment and education. I was born and raised in Fort Erie. An annual summer trip to Marineland was just part of growing up. I enjoyed it. I'd take my own daughter Miller there, and when Maitland is old enough, she'll be coming too. I actually believe, and I know some members will disagree with me, that by actually seeing the marine animals up close, to touch the beluga whales, as you can do at Marineland, imbues in our children a value for nature and for life and an interest in marine mammals.

I know some colleagues in debate have said, "Well, they can watch the Internet." Other members have said, "Well, you go on an ocean cruise and see the animals in the wild." Truthfully, that's a rather elite opinion, because a lot of my constituents can't afford to do that. The Internet may be a choice for some, but over a million people each year make a choice to visit Marineland, to enjoy the activities at Marineland and to see the animals themselves.

I worry that the government may be winking and nodding at some rather radical opinion—there are protests on occasion at Marineland—that all aquariums and zoos should be shut down and the only place to see an animal is in the wild. It's a legitimate opinion; I don't share that opinion. But I think we have to be careful, as legislators, not to run down that course and either try to ban or, over time, regulate businesses out of business that offer legitimate choice to families and educational benefits. We need to be cautious.

What concerns me too, as a member from Niagara and somebody who is very open in saying I enjoy what Marineland does and I have a belief in a high standard that it upholds—I'll speak to that a bit later on—is that I'm a little worried that the government is using this opportunistically. There's the old expression in politics

about the channel changer: talking about an issue to deflect from the major issues of the province, for example, the unemployed families who can barely make ends meet, higher hydro bills, the fact that we are spending well beyond our means and have no serious plan to get our economy back on track or to make sure, like families have to do, that we spend only as much as we take in. Sometimes to change the channel they would talk about alcohol—that's common, and we've seen that in play; another one is to talk about killer whales, orcas and other marine life. It's part of the business, I guess, but I want to caution the government that in playing to a more radical opinion out there, and in trying to change the channel, that they may put an active business out of business, again, one enjoyed by a million men, women and children on an annual basis. They do have 700 employees who depend on work there. They are, I think, the single biggest advertiser to bring tourists to Niagara Falls and the region and the largest generator of overnight stays.

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I think, over time, my colleague from St. Catharines has known folks who had worked at Marineland. There are tens of thousands of families who have been able to pay the bills out of that work. I think we would agree, those of us who know the park and know the place, that it wasn't simply a job; they loved the animals. They actually cared deeply about them. People who would work there day in and day out wanted to make sure that the killer whales there, the dolphins, the sea lions—any of the animals—would have been taken care of. I simply don't believe the more radical view that somehow tens of thousands of Niagarans are in on the plot, abusing animals simply to get a paycheck. I don't believe that, nor do those like my family, who would go every summer.

Marineland's business depends on ensuring that the animals are treated well. Otherwise, they wouldn't be in business very long and would have a heck of a time attracting employees. The case is actually the opposite, Speaker.

I think the government needs to be very cautious in its approach when ensuring we have strong standards in the province and not to use this as a backdoor way to regulate a business out of business, as we've seen in the United Kingdom, where they have brought in standards that weren't about improving animal welfare; they were about closing down aquariums. I know there will be supporters of the Liberal Party that are pushing for that. I don't think that's right. I think Niagarans watching and listening would agree that the jobs only come about out of high standards for animal care. They get tickets sold and get people to work.

So how do you go about doing that? It just seems to me that the most sensible way forward is to base decisions on standards around the most modern science and expertise.

The government, to its credit, did commission a study by Dr. Rosen, a renowned marine biologist. Our friend from Chatham-Kent-Essex spoke quite a bit about Dr.

Rosen's report. It seems to be sensible that what they call the CCAC standard, the standard from the Canadian Council on Animal Care, should be the standard. It's nationwide. It is the highest level of care for animals, not only in Canada but I think worldwide-recognized. Marineland, I believe, would support that point of view. I know their employees would, and their patrons.

Why not, instead of allowing a minister who could be influenced for political means, or has already used this issue to distract attention from big issues around jobs and the deficit—I don't think they've earned our trust on their motive here. Instead, why not enshrine the CCAC standards, that high level that Marineland would support and patrons would support, as opposed to the arbitrariness of political decision-making behind closed doors?

When you look at, for example, neonics in the province and the decision around that, which has actually run from science and embraced emotion—it's going to cause hardship for our farmers and increase the cost of goods—or the way the government is using a climate change debate to hide behind, to increase taxes—even though the Premier did promise not to increase gas taxes, that's exactly what is going to happen through their new carbon tax initiative—I just don't trust them to give the ministry the authority to put something out of business. So let's use the CCAC standards.

The other comment I'll make on the animal welfare basis is particularly around the killer whale, the orca. The government says that this bill will ban taking orcas from the oceans and putting them in captivity. That was part of my colleague the minister's comments earlier on. But I think we actually know that it is pretty much impossible to do that. This was a practice decades ago. Kiska has been there for decades already, but international treaties have basically banned taking any more orcas out of the oceans into captivity. So this is not a reality. This does not happen. The notion of banning something that doesn't take place isn't really much of a true effort. It's actually a channel changer, as they say.

That issue aside, which, in practice, simply doesn't exist anymore in Canada and in the free world—the other aspect of this is, and I think my colleagues across the floor are going to listen to reason on this: We all recognize that Kiska, the killer whale currently there, cannot be put back in the wild. That would be a death sentence. But the government is also banning any kind of companionship down the road, so we're condemning it forever, until the animal perishes, to a life of isolation.

There may be circumstances where another aquarium has an extra killer whale. There may be circumstances where an aquarium does not continue in business and has a killer whale—to actually match them up. I believe the scientific community, as the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex put out there, wants to see companionship for these animals. So I do hope that a sensible change will take place in the legislation to allow that kind of sensible alternative.

We agree with the ban. That has actually been the practice for some time now. It's not because of this legislation; it's just a long-standing fact.

It will give that opportunity for Kiska the killer whale to actually have a companion.

I know I have other colleagues who want to speak on this bill, Speaker.

I want to, again, emphasize caution by the government in their approach; to use a science- and expertise-based approach to having high standards for animal welfare. And don't use the short-term political opportunism or catering to a radical vote to arbitrarily close down a business that employs 700 people and invests millions in the local economy. I think there's a much better way of doing it. That's the approach we'll take as the PC caucus.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you to the minister for the opportunity to speak to Bill 80, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act, 2015.

I'd like to take a moment to speak to the fact that this is actually the very first opportunity that I have had, as critic, to speak to this bill. The government has scheduled debate at such times that I have always been fulfilling other legislative duties in committee. So it's interesting: This is the first time I can actually speak to this bill, and it's during a debate on time allocation. I've heard of speed dating, Mr. Speaker, but this Liberal speed debating is new, and I wouldn't say it's in the best interests of Ontarians.

Back to this bill: When I was appointed as the NDP critic for community safety and correctional services, I didn't expect that the first bill I would have the opportunity to discuss in my new role would be regarding animal welfare, or, in this case, "whalefare," but I very much appreciate the opportunity.

The origins of this bill predate my time at Queen's Park, which shows you how long the changes have been needed. Regardless, I appreciate that the changes are being made now, and I will be supporting this bill at second reading, and I look forward to helping to improve this bill.

Speaker, the intention of the bill is to strengthen the existing protections for marine mammals in Ontario's marine parks and aquariums, as well as to provide new regulations for how large marine mammals can be observed or utilized for research. The priority, of course, is animal welfare, an area where a number of improvements were needed, but there are also a number of other considerations that need to be taken into account, which I will touch on during my remarks today.

As members of provincial Parliament, we all attempt to become educated on the various topics that we discuss in this chamber. But regardless of how extensive our research is, we are not the experts. Rather, we are representatives of those experts, and so I will also touch on some of the reports that informed the creation of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act as well.

Speaker, I appreciate the intentions of this bill, and I look forward to working with the government during the

committee phase to ensure that when Bill 80 reaches third reading, those intentions are still reflected in the final product.

I will begin with a review of what is in the bill.

The first few schedules of the bill deal with establishing new limitations around the selling, acquisition or breeding of orcas for captivity in Ontario; namely, the prohibition of all three. However, there are some exceptions that are also established within the bill. I will refer to section 3, subsection (1), which states: "No person shall possess or breed an orca in Ontario." In section 3, subsection (2), however, there is a caveat established that, "Despite subsection (1), a person may continue to possess an orca in Ontario if the person possessed the orca in Ontario on March 22, 2015," or, the day before this bill was introduced for first reading. The reason for this exception, Mr. Speaker, is due to extenuating circumstances. Currently, there is a single orca in captivity in Ontario: Kiska, who is currently held at Marineland.

Orcas are the largest whale kept in captivity. They travel the farthest, the fastest, and they are uniquely unsuited to captivity. This is because there are unique challenges when it comes to keeping whales or dolphins, the biggest of which is attempting to replicate their natural environment. We can replicate a terrestrial environment for an elephant, but building a pool that would have enough space for a whale, or would, more specifically, be deep enough for a whale—these are the finite constraints of constructing a marine environment, and orcas and other types of whales are also uniquely susceptible to stress, all of which can be amplified by such a constrained environment.

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It has been noted that the average life expectancy of an orca in captivity is roughly 40 years. This also happens to be the age that Kiska is currently approaching. It's also worth noting that life expectancy in the wild is actually closer to about a century. According to the government, in their consultations with experts they were told that, because of Kiska's age, any attempt at relocation may ultimately do more harm than help and could seriously jeopardize Kiska's health, which is ultimately why they opted to maintain this exemption.

The part that does raise eyebrows, however, is subsection 3(3), which states, "Despite subsection (1), a person who first possessed an orca in Ontario on or after March 23, 2015, but before the day the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act, 2015 received royal assent, may continue to possess the orca in Ontario until the day that is six months after the day the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act, 2015 received royal assent."

What this means is that the government has created a small window of six months following the royal assent of this act which would allow other orcas to be possessed in Ontario. I will leave it to the government to explain the reasoning for this additional detail, as I would like some further justification from them on why this subsection needed to be included in this bill. There may be a reason-

able justification for the window, so we will await that explanation. Fortunately, this is what the committee stage is for, and I look forward to further discussion on this point.

Certainly the focus of Bill 80, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act, has targeted its impact to orcas in captivity, but the reach of the bill is broader than that. Under this bill, the minister's regulation-making authority would also be extended to include prescribing administrative requirements related to the keeping of animals, including the establishment of animal welfare committees, animal care plans, veterinary care programs and mandated record-keeping and disclosure, as well as regulating human activity around the care of the animal, not just what physically touches the animal.

The legislation would also amend the Animals for Research Act, which would allow the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, or OSPCA, greater oversight over the condition of large marine animals used in research. This includes providing inspectors the power to look at enclosures that the animal is not currently in but may be transported to at a later time, to ensure that they, too, are up to standard.

The amended act would also provide for the setting of regulations around the keeping, care and use of other marine mammals, such as walrus and dolphins, and regulations surrounding enclosure sizes, limits to sound exposure to animals and water quality would all be strengthened. Speaker, you can see that the act covers a spectrum of topics, but ultimately the purpose remains central to ensuring that large marine mammals are given the respect and proper treatment they deserve as the incredible and impressive creatures that they are.

As I mentioned earlier, I am not an expert in the field. I do have a degree in biology, and I am well acquainted with creatures across the province and beyond; just as a fun fact, it does seem like a lifetime ago, but I did field research in the rainforest, studying frogs and tadpoles in Vietnam over a summer when I was a student at Queen's.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Fun fact. I also did some fieldwork in intertidal marine biology, studying starfish in the Bay of Fundy. However, the marine mammals that this bill addresses are on a significantly larger scale. Therefore, I will lean on the true experts and refer to a few reports that helped to inform the creation of this bill.

In 2012, the government first announced its intention to address issues of animal welfare in Ontario. As we all know, this government doesn't exactly move too quickly with things, so it wasn't until 2013 that a panel was commissioned on the care and maintenance of marine mammals. The report of the expert panel was finally received the year following, in June 2014, and they reaffirmed the position of animal rights activists across the province that the current standards were insufficient.

The report that the expert panel tabled, known as *Developing Standards of Care for Marine Mammals in Captivity and Recommendations Regarding How Best to*

Ensure the Most Humane Treatment of Captive Cetaceans, or, for short, the UBC report, outlined extensive recommendations—124 pages in total—for the government to adopt.

As additional background, a cetacean is a mammal such as a whale, dolphin or porpoise that lives in the ocean. They are complex creatures with complex social interactions and complex needs—but back to the report.

Some of the recommendations included requiring facilities that hold marine mammals to meet their physical and psychological environmental needs, requiring that facilities ensure that marine mammals are not harmed in their contact with the general public and requiring that facilities must demonstrate commitment to the long-term care and well-being of marine mammals.

To provide an overview of the issues that the expert panel was evaluating, I will read from the summary of the report:

“There are several aspects specific to the aquarium environment that can potentially cause stress in captive cetaceans, although none are unique to this group, and most can be mitigated through proper husbandry and habitat design. The most critical issues identified are the need for adequate pool space and design, appropriate social groups, and environmental enrichment. Additional concerns relate to suitable light and sound exposure in the habitat.

“The relative survival rates of captive cetaceans in comparison to their wild counterparts seem to vary by species. However, there is an overall trend for wild-caught individuals to suffer higher rates of mortality during the capture process and upon the initial acclimation period in the facility....

“Studies have demonstrated that cetaceans show physiological responses to stress that are typical of other mammals, although the nature of the stress response varies considerably by species. Studies show that transport, arrival at a new facility, and the introduction of new ‘pool mates’ can cause acute stress in several species. Unfortunately, obtaining samples to monitor the health status of individual captive cetaceans can also lead to stress responses, although adequate training can reduce these negative effects. Behavioural observations can be used as an alternate, inexpensive means to assess some aspects of animal well-being....

“These findings suggest that ensuring the welfare of captive cetaceans presents unique challenges due to the psychological and physiological needs of these animals. While we have given special consideration to the welfare of captive cetaceans according to the objectives set forth for the committee, we have considered all marine mammals in our review of existing regulations. It is our opinion that the present standards of care that apply to marine mammals in public display facilities are insufficient under the current Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. It is our opinion, based upon our review of the regulations and the available scientific evidence, that adequate care in captivity requires the adoption of an additional set of standards of care to address needs specific to this group of animals.”

These are fairly straightforward asks—common sense, one might even say—and, regardless of the technical nature of the issue, we can all understand the need for increased regulations surrounding enclosures, interactions, water quality etc. So we are pleased that these broad concepts are reflected in this bill, but disappointed that it has taken so long to get here. We look forward to working with the government and animal rights experts in the committee stage to ensure that all of the necessary components of the bill are included.

Though this legislation will strengthen protection for large marine mammals in captivity in Ontario, both present and future, the provisions regarding orcas in captivity will most directly affect Marineland. I was pleased to learn that Marineland has been involved throughout the creation of Bill 80 and worked as a member of the technical advisory group for this bill, along with other industry groups and experts.

As we all know, Marineland has a long history as a significant tourist attraction, and as the tourism industry plays such a significant role in the community in Niagara, I was pleased to learn that Marineland has been involved in the creation of the legislation.

Following the government’s tabling of this bill at the end of March, Marineland issued the following statement, and I’ll read that into the record:

“Marineland supports the government’s commitment to seeking guidance and following the best advice from marine mammal experts regarding appropriate standards of care for marine mammals.

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“The technical advisory committee provides essential input from independent marine mammal veterinarians and scientists who have decades of experience rescuing marine mammals, and providing for their ongoing health and care.

“Marineland trusts that the committee members can work co-operatively to provide the government with clear advice and direction towards meaningful standards that will ensure the continuing health of all marine mammals.

“Marineland believes it is essential that the process remain focused on the health and welfare of marine mammals, the decades of scientific research and experience that should inform the setting of standards, and on achieving clear and enforceable standards. We support the government’s view that legal standards need to be based on science, not political ideologies or public relations, and the technical advisory committee and the government’s own expert panel report should provide the basis on which to proceed.”

They continue: “Marineland trusts the government will focus on the clear recommendations of its expert panel and its chairman, Dr. Rosen. Marineland supports the recommendation of Dr. Rosen that the recently released comprehensive, independent, and peer-reviewed Canadian Council on Animal Care guidelines be adopted. The guidelines are detailed, comprehensive in scope, and provide clear direction to any facility that houses marine mammals. The guidelines represent over 10 years of

work by virtually the entire Canadian scientific community with expertise in the marine mammal field and represent the best practices of marine mammal care.

"Marineland meets or exceeds those standards and is committed to maintaining and enhancing the health and care of all its marine mammals."

Speaker, on top of consulting with experts, it is also important to consult with the parties that will be affected by legislation to ensure that the community as a whole is able to transition effectively following any changes. We appreciate that this has occurred with this particular piece of legislation and hope that the bill is stronger as a result.

That being said, there are areas where this bill comes up short. I have already touched on the fact that this bill took a matter of years to come to fruition, but in its current form there are still areas for improvement, primarily in terms of enforcement.

Currently, Bill 80 would only allow the OSPCA to apply to the courts to remove a marine mammal in contravention of the act if the facility fails to do so itself, rather than having the ability to enforce the act directly. Consequently, this could permit the continued mistreatment of animals, as any sort of lengthy court application process, wait time or extended case could immensely draw the process out.

As well, I noted earlier that the bill permits a six-month period where prohibited animals can be brought into the province temporarily before being removed, which the government will have to elaborate on. As always, the legislation remains vague in areas about how the OSPCA's powers will be extended, and we look forward to clarifying during the committee stage.

This bill deals with increasing protections and regulations for marine mammals living in captivity in Ontario, and as the new critic for community safety and correctional services, I would be remiss not to also bring to the government's attention the need for increased protections and standards for humans living and working in captivity in Ontario. I believe wholeheartedly in the importance of the intentions of this legislation, but it is also my obligation to remind the government that all things cannot be swept under the rug. So while we are talking about life in captivity, let's talk about all life in captivity.

At the Toronto South Detention Centre, inmates are living in deplorable conditions and lack access to adequate health care and adequate supports for mental health. In multiple facilities, infirmaries are being used as additional holding space for inmates because of overcrowding and understaffing, and across the province, corrections officers are being denied access to adequate training that plays a vital role in their safety and the safety of the inmates they protect.

We need to improve the conditions for all life in captivity, just as we need to improve the conditions for marine mammals. It has taken years for this bill to actually reach the Legislature, and I hope that it will not take the government as long to address other pressing concerns facing the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Just in case, I just wanted to start the discussion now.

I will finish up by thanking the minister for the opportunity to speak today; like I said, I didn't expect this to be the first bill I would speak to as the new critic for community safety and correctional services, but it is an important topic and I have appreciated the chance to share my thoughts. The priority of this bill must first and foremost be increasing protections and standards for large marine mammals in our province, and though it isn't perfect, I believe that this goal is reflected in Bill 80.

This is about setting minimum standards. The closer these minimums are to best practices, the better, but we need to guarantee a minimum standard of care for all animals in captivity, and we hope that this bill will do just that. Currently, too many things are left up to inspector discretion on what is adequate or appropriate. Minimums must be quantifiable and enforceable if the intent of the bill is going to be realized.

I appreciate that the relevant experts and stakeholders have been consulted and included throughout the process and hope that they will continue to be regularly consulted as this bill progresses through the Legislature. New Democrats welcome this legislation, and I am pleased to support Bill 80, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act at second reading.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. I look toward to working with the government and related experts during the committee stage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise again today to speak to Bill 80, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act, 2015.

Before I get into what I have to say with regard to this bill, I honestly would like to compliment my friend and colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook for his compassionate appeal to this bill, specifically as it pertained to Kiska the orca and her need for companionship—this bill doesn't do that—and the fact that this bill could actually be shutting down businesses, especially in the Niagara area, leaving hundreds of people unemployed. You know, if there's something that this government is good at, that's it. They know how to force businesses out of this province and leave tens of thousands of people unemployed.

Thankfully for myself, and perhaps some of the members here present in the Legislature today, I'm not going to be delivering remarks for an hour again, so they can breathe easy for that. In a lot of ways, we do support this bill, but we have some concerns with how it is presently written. I'd like to take a moment to highlight what some of those concerns are.

Such legislation has never been passed before in the province of Ontario, so in my hour lead-off I made a comparison to other jurisdictions that have already introduced an orca ban or similar legislation designed to protect the welfare of marine mammals and specifically orcas.

In several US states, the keeping of a single orca by itself in captivity has been outlawed. These states have

decided that this constitutes animal cruelty. But these changes were supported by animal rights groups because it is universally agreed that orcas are social animals that should be with their own kind. Well, why, then, is Ontario seeking to legislate loneliness onto Kiska, the killer whale, at Marineland, for the rest of her life? What responsible jurisdictions outlawed as animal cruelty, Ontario is looking to set in stone in the case of Kiska. It may help whales in the future, but it will hurt Ontario's only orca as the bill is currently written, and we're concerned with that. We want to do what's best for all orcas, including Kiska.

What if there is eventually another orca that cannot be released into the wild but is currently living in a facility that is below the standards of Ontario's only orca facility? If it's agreed upon by experts that it would be in the best interest of both orcas to move the captive one to a better facility, with the welfare of both orcas being the criteria, why not allow the ministry to make an exemption in such a specific case?

In this example, I'm talking about an orca that, like Kiska, would already be in captivity where veterinarians have determined that they cannot be set free due to health reasons and that that particular orca is living in inferior conditions. Therefore, if there's ever a way to give Kiska some company while also improving the life of another orca, surely we would need to do so.

In California, a bill was introduced that would place some restrictions around orcas in captivity. Their government decided to take a measured approach and have thorough public consultation and feedback in the interest of making their legislation the best that it could be.

This is an example of responsible government that I hope Ontario follows.

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We want to make sure that Bill 80 will actually provide meaningful and helpful changes regarding animal welfare in the province. The government is stating that consultation has come before the presentation of this bill and the rest of the consultation will come after this bill is passed through a panel comprised of experts on all sides. Well, it's great that the government will be bringing a diverse group to the table, but why not have this consultation in committee, where the public can observe the discussion and participate if they choose?

Again, we wonder why Dr. Rosen and his committee specifically stated that the question of whether marine mammals should be kept in captivity at all was not within the purview of their report. For whatever reason, they were not given the authority to address this question. Yet, the orca ban is the only concrete part of the bill. The rest is like fill-in-the-blanks: You have a general idea of what it's going to look like, but until the dots are connected we have no idea what the final product will actually look like.

Consultation in committee is incredibly important. As written, the majority of the changes that Bill 80 will cause will come into effect well after the bill is inevitably passed, and with very little oversight. This is because the

meat of the bill comes through granting extra powers to bring in the actual changes through regulations at some point in the future.

On this side of the House, we feel that it's important that if the government is going to grant extra powers to any agency, it must also grant extra oversight. Anything else would be asking the opposition to simply trust the government and take their word for it in regard to extra powers, and quite frankly, that trust has not been earned.

We've seen this government dust off ancient laws for their own purposes, such as using the World War II-era Public Works Protection Act to secretly cause the largest mass arrests in Canada's history.

Now we're seeing the Liberal government rewrite laws so they can spend as they please. By law, any money raised from the fire sale of Hydro One must be used to pay off its \$27-billion debt. Well, helping the Ontarians who struggle to pay their hydro bills simply just won't do for this government, so they've announced that they'll simply scrap the law so they don't have to help provide a break on energy bills. Therefore, energy bills are in fact going to spike an average of an additional 5%—15%, actually—on May 1.

By the way, since October 2011, just as a matter of point—and I deviate just a little bit—energy prices in this province from October 2011 to effective May 1 will have gone up 49.1%. It's unbelievable. As I said earlier, to my previous point: This government is really good at driving business out of here and raising the unemployment rate.

To say that this government has a history of exploiting loopholes or changing policy behind closed doors to suit their own current political needs would certainly be an understatement. One simply cannot hand this government a blank cheque without also including accountability measures. It's a really sad state of affairs when that must be said when discussing a bill focused on such a specific issue, but that is the reality of the situation, and it speaks to the ill health of our democracy and this government.

Bill 80 was introduced back on March 23, it came up for second reading on March 31, and now, today, April 21, less than one month after the introduction of the bill, the government is pulling time allocation. Some may say that's not a very long amount of time to debate a bill. But it's clear that the Liberals are grasping at straws, trying desperately to change the channel from the numerous debacles that have occurred over the last few weeks.

This is a government that will go out of its way to ensure that Ontarians are focused on smaller issues instead of looking at the bigger picture. There was a textbook example of this last week when the government was pleased to keep the focus on grocery stores getting limited amounts of beer in a couple of years, with a new beer tax hike to boot, instead of focusing on the 60% sell-off of Hydro One that will have a massive impact on each and every person in the province.

One certainly could say that forcing massive energy bill hikes upon the many people in this province who are struggling to get by month to month is, in fact, inhumane. And perhaps this bill, as it relates to Kiska the orca at Marineland, is also inhumane.

Yes, the physical well-being of Kiska the orca whale is something that concerns each and every one of us here in this Legislature, and I'm sure it is a concern for the ministry staff, in addition to the staff who take care of her presently at Marineland. But the reality is that zero orcas were imported into Ontario in 2014 and zero orcas were in fact born in Ontario in the same year, 2014.

Just as a comparison, there is nothing in the law in Ontario to prevent anyone from owning exotic animals, so in Ontario you can't buy an orca, but if you want to buy 50 snakes, knock yourself out. Go for it.

This bill coming up again is channel-changing during budget week. The government very much wants the public to focus on how they heroically managed to reduce the number of orca imports to zero from a massive zero instead of worrying about the crippling debt that is piling up around each and every one of us every day. If Ontario's deficit last year was as low as the number of orcas that were imported or born in the province, then they would have something to talk about. Sadly, last year's deficit was not zero; it was in fact \$10.9 billion. It's a shadow that hangs over each and every one of us as we debate any bill right here in the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate? The member for Pembroke-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's good enough for me, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I got Pembroke in.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You did. You did, Speaker. You got them all in; just sometimes the order gets a little mixed up. I do it myself sometimes.

It is, I was going to say, a pleasure to speak to this, but it's not. It's always difficult for me to speak to a time allocation motion because it's speaking to something that I know—I know the guillotine is waiting. The hangman is waiting for me just outside the door because in short order, folks out in TV land, this debate will be over. We know that it's going to be over very shortly. The sad part is that I never even had the opportunity to speak to this bill during the debate. I look at my colleagues here and I see them putting their hands up and saying that none of them had the opportunity to speak to this bill.

I listened to my colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook earlier. I listened to my colleague from Chatham—Kent—Essex. And I was here when my colleague from Chatham—Kent—Essex spoke for an hour to this bill. It was a whale of a speech. No, I'm going to tell you, it was great. He hit on some very, very succinct points.

Speaker, there is not a member of this Legislature—in fact, there are not many people at all in this great province of Ontario who do not consider the protection of animals to be a priority. It is certainly a priority for members in our caucus. But we do rightfully question some of the reasoning behind this particular bill. My colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook articulated that very well, as did my colleague from Chatham—Kent—Essex.

I too have to ask some questions. Is this the beginning of something that could result in the end of any animals in captivity in the province of Ontario? Could it mean the end of the Toronto Zoo or other such institutions? I know that we've had all of our kids at the Toronto Zoo.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Don't be alarmist.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I know my friend from St. Catharines says that's alarmist. I'm not trying to be alarmist; I am legitimately questioning because there is an element of people out there who believe absolutely that no animal should ever be kept in captivity. They are there, I say to my friend from St. Catharines. He knows that. Will they look at Bill 80 and say, "Okay, battle number 1 has been won. Let's move on to battle number 2." I know that he wants to say that that's not the case, but he knows differently. They do exist out there and we want every legitimate concern for animals to be dealt with in the most reasoned and full way. No animal should ever be mistreated, whether they're in captivity or otherwise.

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But there are some things in this bill that cause us concern in that regard. I'm going to leave that, as my colleague from—I only have a certain amount of time, just like this bill only has a certain amount of time. The axe is about to fall on the bill and, perhaps, on me. I'm going to deal more with the motion itself from here on in, but I did want to put those concerns on the record, because a lot of people I talk to in the great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke also share those concerns. Sometimes something that is full of good intentions can have unintended consequences. We have to be careful about that.

I do want to speak about the use of time allocation itself and how difficult I find having these debates, because it amounts to a shutting down of debate, a stifling of debate, an affront to democracy. Every one of us who is elected here believes that we came here with the responsibility of standing in this chamber—this great, august chamber—and speaking on behalf of those people who, in the case of many of us, have repeatedly sent us here to speak on their behalf. That is an honour every time I stand in front of this microphone and do that.

I hate to single out my colleague from St. Catharines, and I hope he doesn't take this personally, but—

Mr. Steve Clark: He didn't take it when I quoted from him—he didn't take it personally then.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —he has been here since the covered wagons came across the west. Actually, since 1977—he's been here since 1977, so he's been here a long, long time. He actually ran for a seat in this House in 1967, centennial year. In just a few years, Canada is going to be 150.

He's had some very, very strong opinions on time allocation. I just want to, if I may—if you would indulge me, Speaker, as to what the honourable member said on December 11, 2001. You know, that's 13 and a half years ago. Here it is. The quote comes up:

"Mr. Bradley: This is indeed an interesting bill, but what's even more interesting right now is the time

allocation motion that faces us. For the people who are watching this perhaps on their television sets at home, I should clarify that. That is the choking off of debate, the ending of debate or the government allocating how much time there shall be for the debate on a piece of legislation."

Well, you know what? The reality of that statement holds as true today as it did in December 2001. This amounts to "the choking off of debate," because the government is deciding how much time they will allocate on a piece of legislation. "Choking off of debate": That's what Mr. Bradley said in 2001. I couldn't have said it better, but perhaps he says it better himself here further on.

This is, again, from the member from St. Catharines, who spoke on this debate earlier: "We are operating in this Legislative Assembly at this time almost exclusively on what are called time allocation motions." Boy, is he a prophet? My goodness—"exclusively on what are called time allocation motions. That's most unfortunate, because it's what you would call"—oh my goodness, just what I said—"anti-democratic."

I'm going to have to go home when I'm done here and get out the Bible and see if there's a book of Bradley. It might be right next to Isaiah, because he is definitely a prophet, Mr. Speaker. He said in 2001 that this was called "anti-democratic," and that the government was working on exclusively time allocation motions. Wow.

Is Kreskin still around? I think he passed away. We have our own Kreskin right here in the Legislature. Do not let him put his hand on your forehead, folks: He'll read your mind. He'll read your mind; he must have read mine, because he knew exactly what I was going to say. He knew exactly what I was going to say on time allocation.

Speaker, I wish I could continue, because there are other quotes, actually, from the member from St. Catharines.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'll get to them in my speech.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But I have every confidence that my colleague from the great riding of Leeds–Grenville is going to pick up where I leave off. I say to the prophet from St. Catharines: We're not done with you yet.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to rise in debate today. The deputy leader of the New Democrats may be a little shy of his new title, but I think he's going to be speaking to this bill in a little while.

I again want to reiterate some of the complaints that I have about this government. We're seeing in this Parliament an increasing shrinking of debate in the House. Bill 80, the bill that is being time-allocated, the marine mammals act, has only received seven hours and six minutes of debate. In fact, only four members of our caucus have had an opportunity to speak, one of which was your hour-long lead, Mr. Speaker, as critic for the party. So you have a situation now where—and I'm not

blaming the Clerks at the table. Obviously, when they work with you, they have a formula that the government can use to either have a closure motion, which appears, by my calculation, at about 10 hours of debate—at least that's what I see; there are a number of other factors. And now we're seeing these time allocation motions happening after about seven hours of debate, if my calculations are correct.

What we're seeing, bill after bill after bill, is what the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and I are calling speed debating. You're having a 20-minute rotation split between four, five, six, sometimes even seven members, very short speeches so that the government benches can have as many speakers as possible; and that, somehow, is used in a formula that you, Mr. Speaker, and other Speakers allow to collapse debate.

Again, I want to put on the record my concern that with every single bill this government tables, they either ask for closure after 10 hours or they're starting to time-allocate all these bills. It's a concern of mine. Here, the greatest issue that I have is that in this case, with Bill 80, we've only had four of our members—far, far too few members. In my entire five years as an MPP, to see a bill be time-allocated after four official opposition speakers—it's unbelievable. So I want to put that on the record.

I think that you, sir, in your speech today, and the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook as well, have put a number of very important points on the record about Marineland and about what this bill does. I know other members in their speeches—and as I said, there was only four of them—also mentioned the OSPCA and their involvement in animal welfare in the province. One of the suggestions that I had when the government shuttered Kemptville College was that maybe we could provide some training for OSPCA officers in animal husbandry. I had that from a number of farm groups. So there's a renewed interest in that organization.

I don't think this bill has had enough debate. The member for Renfrew talked about the member for Niagara Falls, the Honourable Jim Bradley, who has made so many very, very eloquent speeches in this House. The one that I'm very fond of is one that he made during time allocation debate on November 24, 1993. That was, obviously, when Bob Rae and the New Democrats held the reins of power here in the Legislature. Here's what—

Interjections.

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Mr. Steve Clark: I didn't know I said something funny—Mr. Bradley said at the time, "I wish to speak to the closure motion which is before the House by once again indicating my concern at the number of closure motions which have been forthcoming from the government House leader and under the NDP government of Bob Rae.

"The reason I do that is that in many years gone past Mr. Rae entered the House in a by-election when Mr. Lewis resigned. Mr. Rae became the leader after Mr.

Cassidy stepped down as leader. I can well recall that he felt very strongly about the fact that the opposition should have the opportunity to fully canvass all the arguments on any of the bills before the House, and he was a very strong defender of that particular opportunity."

It's just very ironic that the member from the Garden City now takes away that principle from the opposition that only four members of Her Majesty's opposition can actually question this bill or put the arguments on the table before the bill gets—using the words that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke quoted Mr. Bradley “choking off debate.” Debate now is being choked off; the fact that this bill is yet another bill in a long line of bills that this government is railroading through the Legislature.

I'll go on and continue to quote the member for Niagara Falls back from that wonderful speech from 1993: “I'm concerned about the closure motions because I think they limit legitimate debate. I recognize that a government ultimately might have the opportunity to close down a debate that's been going on a very long period of time. But as I've indicated to the House in days gone by, the purpose of these debates is to canvass public opinion, to make the public aware of what is happening.

“All of us have experienced the situation where we have encountered our constituents and they've said, ‘What is this particular bill all about?’ or ‘How did this bill get passed and I didn't know anything about it?’ They are legitimate questions. One of the reasons is that the bills tend to get passed very rapidly in this House.

“Sometimes there are hearings. There is going to be a bit of an opportunity for hearings in this case. I think there should probably be more time provided for that, but also I think it's important to provide more time to discuss the amendments that might be brought forward by both the government and the opposition. If the hearings are going to be meaningful”—and with all due respect, this is a very important point that Jim Bradley made in 1993. I'll read it again, “If the hearings are going to be meaningful”—and this is a message to the government—“if the hearings are going to be worthwhile, then I think it's exceedingly important for there to be legitimate debate over the amendments that flow from those hearings. That's what makes a bill stronger.”

The reason I want to emphasize that point is that bill after bill after bill that's being put into committee, in this case for a very short period of time, the government doesn't hear the other side. The government does not allow reasonable amendments to be put forward. We had that debate on Monday afternoon in regard to Bill 31, where there were so many amendments put forward by the opposition that would have made and strengthened that bill and each and every time the government turned them down.

Mr. Bradley makes a good point in that speech in 1993. It's a point that I think is lost in this closure motion, this time allocation motion. I'll just, again, read one other excerpt from the speech. “If we want the

Parliament to work on a more or less consensus basis rather than a confrontational basis, it's important for the government to be able to accept amendments from its own members who may have some good ideas or from members of the opposition. Sometimes the members of the opposition put them forward at the behest of those who have made appearances before the committee.

“I think it's important to at least debate those adequately. The provision of this closure motion really means that there won't be an opportunity for that kind of debate which I think is very healthy for legislation of this kind.”

I agree with the member back in 1993. I believe this motion is not appropriate. It doesn't give us the opportunity to have those hearings, to allow people to make those presentations. Again, it's just another bill that this government has shut down without hearing the other side, without allowing us to put forward our members' arguments. Twenty-four out of 28 members of the official opposition have yet to speak to this bill. I think it's shameful that the government would only allow us the 40 minutes as part of this time allocation motion. Just the first two speakers for our party—the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook and yourself, Speaker—put forward some excellent points that I think needed to be debated here and, more importantly, needed to be put forward at committee.

So I leave that with you, Speaker. We're going to vote against this time allocation motion. We're going to stand up for democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): A point of order: I recognize the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I just want to help my colleague out. As much as I appreciate him trying to get Mr. Bradley into Niagara Falls—

Mr. Steve Clark: St. Catharines.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, the member is actually from St. Catharines. I just want to correct his record.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'll correct my record: St. Catharines.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I will allow the member from Leeds–Grenville to correct his record.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's a pleasure to join in the debate. Actually, like my colleagues have said, it's not actually a pleasure, because this type of debate isn't a pleasure. In fact, many people have already said what I'm going to add: that this is another example of a government stifling debate.

While there are some cases that the government can make—that a matter has been going on for so long; so many members have already spoken; all the critics have given their leads; and an exhaustive list of members have already added their voices—in this particular circumstance, it's quite different. In this case, our own member from Oshawa—our critic—hadn't even had the opportunity to give her lead.

Just think about that for a moment. The government is pushing for time allocation to end debate before the critic for this bill even had an opportunity to do her lead. And it wasn't like the member was dodging doing her lead. The member was simply, given the committee duties that she's rightfully to do as part of her duties as a member of this Legislative Assembly, unable to be here because of the limited time this government had allocated to this bill. The government hadn't provided enough opportunity for our own member to be able to give her lead, and the government is now moving towards closure. It's interesting: We've heard some quotations from the member from St. Catharines in the past, being such an opponent of this process, now saying that times are different. It doesn't matter.

I know members on this side of the House are very sure that there's nothing different about democracy, that the principles of democracy don't change because it happened 10 years ago versus today. If what the member from St. Catharines said in 2001—that time-allocating is choking debate and is effectively anti-democratic—then it's just as true then as it is now.

We are quite troubled by the government bringing forward this motion at this time. I mean, really, he said it himself, in the general sense of what we need to do in this House: If we want to govern effectively—this is advice from the government; this is not my advice; this is the government's own advice; this is the member from St. Catharine's own quotation—to govern effectively, to get even more bills passed in this House, time allocation isn't the tool. It actually doesn't speed things up as much as consensus-based decisions could.

The government, if it wanted to, could work with the opposition parties. Where there are some amendments that they can agree upon, work on those amendments, and where there are some agreements for bills that are, perhaps, private members' bills, allow those bills to come forward. There are ways to actually get more work done without time allocation. Time allocation is essentially a blunt tool to deal with as a solution. It's a blunt instrument that is not required. There are many more sophisticated ways to deal with this, Mr. Speaker, and it doesn't have to be by using time allocation.

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In fact, let's talk about the concept of time allocation being anti-democratic. It absolutely is anti-democratic. The purpose of having elected officials from various parts of this province is so that everyone in this province feels that they have a voice. The representatives, very simply, in a representational democracy, are here literally as the voice for those individuals. People have elected and chosen their representative. That representative comes to this House, and on every bill they expect that their member will get up and talk and voice their concerns. Whether it's based on a particular region, whether it's based on a particular demographic, whether it's based on a particular interest, they will get up and advocate whatever those concerns are, because that is why they were chosen to be here and that's what we're here to do.

There's an interesting book. I was talking to the member for St. Catharines and he mentioned a book, *Tragedy in the Commons*. The book goes on to talk about the erosion of the individual members in this House, the powers that we once had as members of opposition and what has happened with those powers. What we're seeing over time is that as the government weakens the role of the opposition, as they use tools like time allocation to end debate, as they limit the ability for members in opposition to challenge and to have a voice in this House, we're seeing an erosion, not only of an individual member's powers but, really, an erosion of democracy. As an individual member's influence weakens, it actually detracts from the ability for us to have a fulsome democracy in this province. This is just one of the many things that are going on. The idea of time allocation, the fact that members don't have the same impact because majority government after majority government has weakened what each individual member can do: These are troubling trends that we're seeing.

My colleague brought up, I think, some very interesting points about the bill itself. To develop a strong piece of legislation requires the input of all people. We live in, and our society has created something that we refer to in the legal system as, an adversarial system. The concept is that through competing voices we come out with the truth. So in a legal setting, we have the defence and the prosecution, they argue the case and the judge makes the final decision.

In this case, we have the government, but we have a strong opposition that actually holds the government to account and also raises important issues that perhaps the government misses. That's the fundamental importance of these debates. It allows for us to inject another opinion, inject another perspective, and when the government time-allocates, they block out this perspective. They block out the ability to hear another point of view. They block out the opportunity to make legislation better, in fact, because when you're testing your legislation, when it's tested and held up to the scrutiny of opposition, the bill becomes stronger. Legislation can be stronger. When it's not held up to that scrutiny, when it doesn't receive that opposition, it's not as strong. So you're weakening your own bill by not allowing it to stand the test of opposition. You're doing not only yourself a disservice, but the province a disservice.

Again, it's not the most efficient way to govern, much like the member said. There are ways to address differences. There is a consensus-based decision-making model that would be more effective, but the government is simply not implementing that process. It's not using that tool, instead resorting to this blunt instrument, this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd just like to remind the member of Bill 80 that we are debating this afternoon—sorry, time allocation. That's what we're debating. I would just ask that you do your best to keep your comments specific to that which we are debating this afternoon.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much. It's really concerning that the government would implement time

allocation, would bring in this overly strong, overly harsh tool to end debate. It's not what we expect the government to do, particularly when there hasn't been very much debate on this bill. There really hasn't been that much. I don't understand why the government sees a necessity to end debate at this point by bringing in this time allocation motion which we are discussing at this point in time.

One of the issues that my colleague brought up, in just talking about the bill itself—of course we're all in support of the proper treatment of animals. Animal welfare is something that we all can agree upon. Whatever the party you're from, everyone agrees with the notion that animals should be protected and that there should be legislation to deal with these issues. My colleague suggested some very interesting points. Perhaps the government felt out of depth with this debate and wanted to end it. Maybe they were having a whale of a time with this debate and found that it was something they couldn't deal with. Perhaps they felt a little bit out of their league in dealing with this bill.

When we're talking about the concept of animals in captivity, I think it's important to discuss, in general, the concept of detention. I applaud my colleague from Oshawa for bringing up the issue of inmates in this province. I think this debate flows very naturally into the discussion of detention in general. It is an important issue that we need to address. In our province, we're seeing inmates being crammed into facilities that are overcrowded. There are not enough services with respect to those who are mentally ill. There's not enough in terms of correctional service officers, who are not being adequately trained, as well as adequate levels of staffing to ensure that people aren't being kept in deplorable conditions, in lockdown. That's an important issue that my colleague brought up.

In addition, when we're talking about the idea of animals being kept in captivity, the idea of animal welfare, it draws to me the concern around people who are being kept in captivity. It reminds me of a recent incident that's going on. Babu Surat Singh Khalsa is on a peaceful protest in Punjab right now, protesting the illegal detention of sick political prisoners. He's being detained by the government unfairly, and it reminds me of the importance of—

Ms. Soo Wong: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Scarborough—Agin court on a point of order.

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is not debating Bill 80. I believe that he started to talk about the time allocation issue, then he talked about everything but time allocation or the mammals act. I think the member needs to be reminded that this is what we're debating. I don't know what he's discussing. We're debating Bill 80.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member for her point of order. Generally speaking, that would be a point of order—although I would like to

remind the member that not only are we debating Bill 80, but it's a time allocation, and he is entitled to reference time allocation in his debate as well.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: A point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from—are you in your seat?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please.

I now recognize the member from Nepean—Carleton on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate that, and you relocating me to my seat.

I just want to make the House aware that the federal government has just now announced that they have balanced their budget, and I would—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. That is not a point of order.

I would like to refer back to the deputy leader of the third party opposition, from Bramalea—Gore—Malton, to continue debate.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured by the title. Thank you, sir.

We're discussing two essential issues. The brunt of my discussion was around time allocation, the concerns around that. I challenge anyone to look at Hansard and to actually reference what I spoke about. I spoke about time allocation for the vast majority of my time.

Also, the bill talks about captivity and the treatment of animals in captivity. That concept of captivity does draw us to talk about what that notion is, broadly speaking. That's why I wanted to reference the fact that folks who are being kept in captivity in terms of detention centres in our province—that's an issue that relates to the concept of captivity.

As I was saying, I think it's important to reference the notion that people are struggling across this world against the idea of people being kept unfairly in detention.

As I stated, Babu Surat Singh Khalsa is a peaceful protestor, an 82-year-old man fighting for the freedom of political prisoners who are kept unfairly in custody. His son Ravinder Jeet Singh has been unfairly detained and arrested simply for helping out his father. His father, Babu Surat Singh Khalsa, again, is on peaceful protest. It's unacceptable that he has been treated this way, being force-fed through a feeding tube. He was on a peaceful hunger strike to release these inmates.

1700

The reason why I bring this up is because the concept of captivity is so offensive that at the minimum we have to ensure that people are treated with dignity when they're in captivity, whether it's inmates here in Ontario or animals in the way they're treated in captivity. It's absolutely important that we recognize that there is a responsibility for us to ensure that those laws around captivity, around the proper treatment of animals and around the protection and dignity of life are ensured.

When we talk about marine animals, a lot of attention has been drawn to Marineland. I think it's important for

us to clarify that our concern here is very clearly with the treatment of animals. Any organization that has proper treatment of animals or is following through with the law in a proper way—we have no issue with that. Our concern is where there are circumstances where animals are mistreated, where there are animals that are not meant to be kept in captivity, where there are certain criteria around the way they're being kept in captivity that are not being met.

I think my colleague from Oshawa really brought up some great points around the limitations and difficulties around captivity when it comes to orcas specifically. They're animals that are meant to roam thousands of kilometres of ocean. They are able to and meant to dive quite deeply in the ocean. Their particular makeup—the way they're designed and the way they've evolved to be—is something that is not well-suited to captivity. That's why those issues are quite important, and I'm glad my colleague brought them up.

Again, this is an important point to make: My colleague was only able to bring that up today, she wasn't able to do a lead on this and she had limited time to be able to discuss this issue. This weakens our ability to represent our constituents here, but it also weakens our ability to make sure that laws that are passed in this Legislature are strong and effective, and actually do the job they're meant to do.

In this case, when it comes to the proper treatment of marine mammals, we missed out on hearing more information and more debate from members in this House who could have talked about specifics around how this bill could be better, specifics around how we can ensure that the treatment of marine mammals is the best possible, discussions around how we can extend, if it's appropriate, this protection to other animals and what the appropriate conditions for those animals should be. These are areas that we could have debated, but the government has sought to time-allocate, ending that debate.

One of the interesting things that has been brought up, a new innovation that this government has developed—an innovation that, in my respectful submission, is not a good innovation—is the whole concept of speed debating. While there is certainly a place and certainly a need, I'm sure, in certain circumstances, for speed dating and maybe a certain recreational purpose for it, speed debating is neither recreationally beneficial nor something that benefits our society. This new implementation of speed debating is something that I question in terms of how this helps our democracy and certainly how it forwards the idea of allowing people to have their voices heard in this place. I think it absolutely does not.

One of the interesting figures we have is 20 speakers in 20 minutes, which may be some sort of record, but perhaps not the type of record that we'd want to be setting here in Ontario. We're setting a lot of records in this province. We set the record of having the highest auto insurance rates in Canada; some of the highest tuition fees in Canada. I guess here's another record: the most debaters in the shortest period of time, because of

time allocation. Again, this is an innovation and this is a record that I don't think our province should be proud of. I think this is something that we should be troubled by, and I think, indeed, we are troubled by it.

So what does time allocation do? The government is allocating how much time can be assigned to a particular debate. It is, in effect, silencing the ability for other members to speak. As the member from St. Catharines said, it's the "choking off of debate." It's also something—to quote, again, the member from St. Catharines—that is "anti-democratic" and it's something that is, again, quite troubling for us to see.

Really the question that arises is—and I asked the government this in this debate—what is the hurry for this particular bill? Why did this government see that, in the case of Bill 80, they needed to rush this legislation along? Was there any sort of concrete reason for it? Was there an evidentiary basis for that? Why did the government see fit, in this particular case, to end debate? What is the reason? I haven't heard any sort of concrete reason, any sort of concrete rationale. It's simply an attempt again to silence and end debate without any reason. I don't think there is, in most cases, any justifiable reason to silence debate, but I would have loved to have heard what the reason is. If this government could come up with one, I would be interested in hearing what that is. Perhaps in the remaining time the government may provide some of that rationale.

Again, what we're faced with here is a bill that many people in this House agree with many portions of, but there are some concerns with the bill. There are some concerns around the way that this bill would be enforced, the scope of the bill, whether the bill addresses a wide enough category of animal, whether it casts a wide enough net, in fact, regarding these sorts of animals and these sorts of conditions.

We're concerned about—does this bill deal with the notion of captivity of animals, broadly speaking? Can this bill address concerns around the captivity of animals in other circumstances, and what should, if any, changes be in those areas? These are areas that this decision to end debate has precluded us from discussing because there is no longer an opportunity to discuss these issues.

Again, in my closing seconds, I think it's clear that the government hasn't provided clear reasons for why this bill needed to be time-allocated. The bill hadn't been discussed for a very significant amount of time, and I challenge the government to prove to me why this is an efficient way of governing. It's not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Can we have some of their time?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 20. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

I have just received notice from the chief government whip to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly:

“Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on government notice of motion number 20 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, April 22, 2015.”

Vote deferred.

ENDING COAL
FOR CLEANER AIR ACT, 2015
LOI DE 2015
SUR L'ABANDON DU CHARBON
POUR UN AIR PLUS PROPRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 26, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 9, An Act to amend the Environmental Protection Act to require the cessation of coal use to generate electricity at generation facilities / Projet de loi 9, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement pour exiger la cessation de l'utilisation du charbon pour produire de l'électricité dans les installations de production.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to join the debate today for Bill 9, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act.

As I rise here in the assembly today to talk about coal as the former energy critic, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the strong contribution of the previous Progressive Conservative government here in the province of Ontario as the first to end a coal-fired plant in this province, under the stewardship of my former colleague and former Deputy Premier Elizabeth Witmer. I think we owe her a great degree of gratitude as a trailblazer on that front.

This is a piece of legislation which effectively started to develop a year ago, perhaps a little bit more, when the Premier had invited Al Gore, of global warming fame, to this assembly down at the MaRS building, which has become quite an expensive endeavour for this assembly.

1710

In addition to that, the government made this grand commitment that they would phase out coal, that they would make it illegal to burn coal. I think the issue here is that this legislation is almost unnecessary if we're going to phase it out completely. Similar to the bill previous regarding marine mammals, this government likes to legislate things instead of just doing them, instead of just setting a good moral tone in terms of moving forward. Again, the government has already phased out coal. It started, of course, with Elizabeth Witmer, a former member of this assembly who sat in the Ontario Progressive

Conservative caucus. This obviously does not require new legislation.

In my opinion, and I believe in the opinion of many people across this great province, the Liberals' plan to legislate this phase-out of coal is nothing more than political posturing. I think, on a day that the federal government has announced that they have actually balanced their budget during these tough economic times and the government of Ontario is not able to do the same thing and is continuing to run up \$10-billion deficits, this government wants to change the channel. In fact, I believe that if this Liberal government were truly committed and concerned about the environment, it would be meeting its own targets on greenhouse gas emissions. That said, this is also a Liberal government that made a commitment to bring in carbon taxing in just these past couple of weeks, yet in the election said that they weren't going to do it.

Let's talk a little bit about Bill 9. The bill bans the burning of coal at power generating stations in Ontario by the end of 2014. We're already into 2015. I think we all recognize that this government has made this decision. I don't think it really requires legislation; it just requires commitment, dedication and action.

If passed, this bill will give the government the ability to impose hefty fines on any person or company that burns coal at a power plant for the purpose of generating power by the end of 2014—of course, we're into 2015—and exceptions are made for facilities that produce a product other than steam or electricity, where the generation of electricity is not its primary purpose, in facilities that use heat, steam or by-product gas from the said facility.

All parties in this assembly, dating back to effectively 2007, during that election, have made the same commitment: that they would phase out coal. What I think is a bigger issue here today—because I think we're all in agreement that we'd like to get away from what people will call “dirty” coal—is the energy mix in the province of Ontario and how we want more clean energy and green energy, and how the Liberals have gone about it at the very difficult rate of increasing hydro bills in the province.

I think that in any debate on energy and the environment in the province of Ontario we should have a discussion on the Green Energy Act. That is where I want to talk and take my time for the next few minutes as we relate this piece of legislation, getting rid of dirty coal, to the other extreme that this government has gone to with respect to the Green Energy Act.

Earlier today, for example, we spoke about legislation on development charges. When we were speaking about that, my colleague from Belleville—

Mr. Todd Smith: Prince Edward–Hastings.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —Prince Edward–Hastings talked about how this Liberal government eroded locally based decision-making with respect to wind turbine developments. Those industrial wind turbine developments are very important, for example, to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. A couple of years ago, I went

with the member through his riding, and he showed me, during the evening, what he called the “red light district,” and that is literally hundreds of wind turbine developments with these little red lights, and how irritating they were to his community.

So I refer you back to the conversation that I had earlier today with the member from Prince Edward-Hastings in his debate on development fees, where he talked about the erosion of locally based decision-making because this government has this idea that it's providing wonderful clean, green energy. So on the one hand, yes, I think they've done what has been called for by all political parties, started of course by ours under Elizabeth Witmer, which is removing coal; but on the other extreme, they've embarked on an over \$20-billion experiment with wind power, and that has driven up hydro rates across the province of Ontario. As a result of that, we're finding that there is energy poverty in Ontario.

I believe that on the past weekend, my friend Jane Wilson—who is the head of Wind Concerns Ontario and who also resides in my home constituency of Nepean-Carleton—pointed out that there are over half a million people right now, in the province of Ontario, dealing with energy poverty. That is in large part because of this government's energy mix; their inability to provide a coherent energy policy; and decisions like the one with the industrial wind turbine developments across the province that are spiking up our prices and which will never replace coal.

For us to have a coherent energy policy in the province of Ontario—and I know a little bit about this, having been the Ontario Progressive Conservative energy critic—I think we ought to be looking at a mix where nuclear is our breadwinner, and we augment that with natural gas as well as hydroelectric water power, that built Ontario, that allowed us to have cheap and affordable hydroelectric power, which then was a great economic job creator for this province, which actually drove people to come to this province. We were able to do two things in Ontario. We were able to have clean and reliable sources of energy and, at the same time, have affordable energy.

That's the problem with this government. And when you see one-off pieces of legislation like this—which really aren't required, because I think it's obviously the general direction of the province in any event—you see that this government is looking at energy policy, again, as patchwork.

I can refer you again to the hydro policy that they're going to be bringing forward on Thursday as part of their budget, where they're going to divest 60% of the public holdings of Hydro One. This was something that, just nine or 10 short months ago, this government would never have done. In fact, they suggested that to break up Hydro One and to put that money toward the debt and public infrastructure would have been the wrong decision.

But now this government, on what I call its debt-bed conversion—because this government, of course, is so mired in debt, at \$10.9 billion—they're forced to make decisions they otherwise wouldn't have done, because

they always wanted to kick cans down the road. If you look at what's going to happen with Hydro One, that is again going to spike the energy prices in this province.

On one hand, we've got coal. We've eliminated it; we phased it out. It's good for the environment. It's good for the health of our children. It's something that we all agree on. I would imagine there are 107 people in this assembly with unanimous consent for phasing out coal, and we don't need the bill.

Then you look at the industrial wind turbine policy, through the Green Energy Act, that this government brought in in 2009, and we see the public treasury being cost about \$20 billion, with no end in sight, and we see hydro bills spike as a result of it.

We see that even when we're using this wind energy at the peak, we actually have to power down our nuclear facilities and we have to spill water and hydroelectric power from Niagara Falls. That's costing Ontario about \$1 billion a year.

Then, of course, we're going to break up Hydro One—or the government is going to—and we're probably going to take a loss on market value.

All of this is to say, Speaker, that if this government is going to continue to tinker around the edges on energy policy, you're going to see that number that Jane Wilson sent to me on the weekend—of half a million people in the province of Ontario in energy poverty—continue to increase.

We're facing tough economic times in the province of Ontario, and I think it's incumbent upon the government to ensure that they have one solid, full energy policy that the government and the people of this province can rely on. But that's not the case.

As I said, this bill is over a year old. I was actually at the MaRS Centre when Kathleen Wynne, the Premier of Ontario, met the former vice-president of the United States, Al Gore—who, among other things, once suggested that he had invented the Internet—and they talked about phasing out coal.

I remember standing there that day. They actually tried to block me from attending, and I remember, because we had staff who said, “This is a member of provincial Parliament; she's allowed to go inside.” They said, “No, she's not,” and then, “Oh, wait. She can stand at the back.” Eventually they allowed me a seat at the very back.

I'm standing there, thinking to myself, “You know, I've run in enough elections now”—this is my fourth, by the way. I just turned 40 in October, and this is my fourth election I've been sent to this place. I remember my second election in 2007. The leader at the time, John Tory from our party—now the mayor of Toronto—stood here in our place and said he was going to phase out coal.

1720

The NDP leader at the time was Howard Hampton.

Mr. Todd Smith: Howie.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Howie said he was going to phase out coal. This was 2007. Then Premier Dalton McGuinty also said he was going to phase out coal.

The Liberals said they were going to phase it out—I think at the time when they first formed a government in 2003, they were going to phase it out by 2007. Then they said they were going to phase it out by 2011. They didn't meet that target, and they said they would meet it by 2014.

Now here we are. The government of course was seven years late and over budget on all of these projects, but we're all at the same place and we have been since effectively in the early 2000s when a Progressive Conservative government under Ernie Eves decided that this was the way to go. It's something that we all agree on.

So this isn't new. It's something I've heard about for almost a decade. The fact that we're debating it here today like it's brand new news and it's revolutionary is a bit of a joke, because as I've stated, Speaker, everyone in this assembly agrees. If we all agree and we all believe that the best way to have clean air in our province is to eliminate and phase out coal, why would we need legislation for that? It's simply going to be something that we would move away from.

In addition to this, I must say that if we're going to talk about phasing out coal in terms of a piece of legislation, why doesn't the government table a comprehensive energy policy, a comprehensive energy plan for the province of Ontario that talks about how we can reduce prices while still at the same time meeting our greenhouse gas emission targets and ensuring that we have a good system in place that transmits and delivers our energy policy right across the province?

I'll be interested, for example, on Thursday, when the government puts forward its budget, in whether or not they have a plan in place to bring natural gas into rural communities across Ontario. That, to me, is something that's going to be very important; I'm sure it is to other members here.

I come from the city of Ottawa. My seat is in the middle of the city. Part of it is urban, part of it is suburban and some of it is rural. If you can believe this, some of my constituents in rural Ottawa don't have access to natural gas. So I'm looking forward to seeing what happens there.

The other thing I would like to know more about from the Liberal government is this: They plan on divesting Hydro One, which I think is a legitimate discussion for us to have in this Legislature; it's one that I think we need to have a significant debate on. But let me take it back to my own community in Nepean–Carleton. Let me talk about the city of Ottawa.

I'm a customer of Hydro Ottawa. My prices are going up, as are the rest. But I have constituents who are on Hydro One. Their prices for their electricity, their home heating, are double mine. It's double because they're with Hydro One.

We know, for example, that Hydro One has had massive challenges with its billing, its accountability and its transparency over the past year—probably even the past decade. That's why the Ombudsman did a report, and that's why we have been very critical of Hydro One on this side of the assembly.

Let me take this one step further as a member from the city of Ottawa and as a resident in the city of Ottawa. I would like to see this Liberal government put forward a plan in this assembly to look at my local distribution in the city of Ottawa, which is Hydro Ottawa, and offer them the ability to assume those Hydro One customers that are inside the city limits. I would think that that would be in the best interests of the ratepayers in my constituency, and I would say that it's probably in the best interests of the people of Ottawa.

My colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills is here. This is something he and I have both championed and both believe is necessary, because there are people in both of our constituencies—as in Ottawa–Orléans, a member of the government, I believe; and as well the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell—who reside inside the city of Ottawa but do not have access to Hydro Ottawa. They are forced to go to Hydro One, at double the cost with less service.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: That's not fair.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That's a bill—and my colleague from Carleton–Mississippi Mills rightly points out that it's not fair. That is a bill that should be before the assembly. This should be a discussion before this assembly. Today, we're talking about phasing out coal, which, as I stated repeatedly, we all agree on. It doesn't require legislation to do the right thing, I don't think. I would imagine the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, who once showed me those industrial wind turbines in his community, would say it's not necessary to have this bill if we all agree with it. But what we do need is a piece of legislation for lengthy discussion in this assembly about our entire energy supply, about the grids, about transmission, about delivery, about cost.

We have to have that discussion in this assembly, and it has to encompass the Green Energy Act. It has to encompass what we're going to do with Hydro One. It has to encompass what we're doing with natural gas in rural communities like in Edwards, which I represent. At the same time, we should be talking about greenhouse gases. We should be talking about that cheap hydro-electric power that we have in Niagara Falls. We should be talking about nuclear energy as we have seen in Bruce and, right here, just outside of Toronto in Pickering.

We should, as a Parliament, as a Legislature, as a body of elected officials, have that discussion in this assembly because today, in Ontario, that is the number one issue confronted by our constituents. It is their ability to pay their power bills. Any parliamentarian in here today who refutes that is either not connected to their community or they are not sharing with you the true picture of what's happening in their constituency.

I'll give you an example before I close. Last year, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry brought me to his riding to meet with seniors in a little town called Long Sault. As I was sitting there, the seniors were shaking. Hydro One hadn't given them bills, and when they finally did, these bills were thousands of dollars. This senior looked at me and said, "This bill is

higher than my old age security.” That’s tough, Speaker, and that’s Ontario.

While I applaud the government for phasing out coal, and while I applaud the third party and my party for their leadership and our collective leadership in this assembly for wanting to phase out coal, I respectfully submit today to this assembly that the discussion we ought to be having on energy policy is a comprehensive plan for Ontario that encompasses the Green Energy Act, Hydro One divestment, the expansion of natural gas into our rural communities and the price of power in this province.

Speaker, that is what I came to Queen’s Park to debate after the 2014 election, and it is an issue that has consistently come up in the past four elections in the riding of Nepean–Carleton when the people of my constituency sent me to this place.

I urge all members of this assembly to have that discussion. I urge the government to come forward with a comprehensive bill, perhaps as an emergency debate or a take-note debate, but one where we will all have our say and provide input into the next decade of energy policy in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Nepean–Carleton. Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It’s indeed an honour to be able to stand in this House and bring to the floor the voices of my constituents in Windsor and Tecumseh—making comments this afternoon from the member from Nepean–Carleton who just spoke on the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act.

She mentioned a friend of mine, Howard Hampton, who, as the former leader of NDP, said he would get rid of coal-burning plants in Ontario. Howard Hampton also wrote the book *Public Power*—an advocate for keeping Ontario Hydro in public hands, and I think that’s important to recognize.

I have respect for the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, as he knows I do. I admire his passion for the environmental file and his almost religious fervour, if I can, on climate change. He brings that passion to the House all the time.

1730

However, I don’t have respect for this bill because there’s nothing new in this bill, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act. Perhaps it could be better known as “why are we spending time on this when we got rid of the coal-burning plants years ago and now why do we want to pat ourselves on the back?” I think that’s because the government wants to change the channel, if you will, put out a different spin cycle to the news agencies, saying, “Oh, they’re doing something on getting rid of coal-burning plants.” They did it years ago, Speaker.

As much as I admire the minister for everything else he’s doing on the environmental and climate change file, this bill—I mean, they’re bringing in time allocations on other things we could be talking about instead of this “pat myself on the back” bill. I can’t support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. I recognize, for further questions or comments, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let’s just get right to the point: Many other jurisdictions have done what Ontario has done, and we’re the only jurisdiction over the last decade that has ever completely phased out coal. No one else in the world has done that. After the mess in Fukushima, countries like Germany and Japan have reintroduced coal. We are getting a lot of credibility for taking this stand internationally because if we look at this in Ontario, it may seem peculiar to people: Why would you put into law something that you’ve just finished doing? Part of it is because you have to come back to this Legislature to reverse-engineer, which has happened in other major jurisdictions which are seeing emissions.

What is also interesting is that in my days as mayor of Winnipeg we had our own hydro energy utility. I looked across the border at the Conservative government that was doing three things that caused a great deal of problems. We don’t have the highest energy prices in Canada, first; we have three provinces that have higher energy prices. And the two with the lowest were Manitoba and Quebec. I know the Manitoba situation really well because half the hydro utilities were owned by the city of Winnipeg in the time I was mayor.

But I saw three things happening. I remember the reports coming on my desk as mayor, saying that the Conservatives were doing three things wrong: Deregulating and stranding assets of the utility; and number two, underinvesting in a transmission system. For 40 years everyone in Canada knew that there were billions of dollars required to repair and replace Ontario’s aging transmission system. While they were underinvesting in infrastructure and trying to keep taxes down, they were just passing on a huge—we have had to spend \$8 billion refurbishing transmission. That’s what’s driving prices.

The other thing was a lack of investment in refurbishing nuclear, which they didn’t invest in. So now we’re playing catch-up with massive refurbishments, because what’s really driving prices is nuclear, transmission and stranded assets. That’s 80% of it. They like to talk about green energy as the problem when green energy is 3% of our investment. It’s pure hokeyness and nonsense.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the minister.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. If I could correct my record: As I was sitting down and said, “I can’t support the bill,” I left out the word “wholeheartedly.” I will be supporting the bill but not with my entire heart and soul.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That is a point of order. Okay. I will accept that. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: I would like to support the member from Nepean–Carleton wholeheartedly on her comments that she made here this afternoon. In 20 minutes she touched on all the important issues facing our energy sector in the province of Ontario. These are things that aren't being dealt with by the current Minister of Energy or the Premier, or the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, for that matter. She hit so many things that I don't know exactly which one to touch on.

I can tell you that there are many people in Prince Edward–Hastings who are dealing with energy poverty right now as a result of the decisions that have been made—ideological decisions, not good planning decisions—by this Liberal government.

My constituency assistants at my offices in Belleville and Picton and also up in Bancroft are constantly in tears because they're upset with the people who are calling in from the riding—seniors who are losing their homes and having their power threatened to be cut off in the middle of the wintertime by Hydro One. These stories are real in Prince Edward–Hastings, as they are in Nepean–Carleton.

I would echo the sentiments of the member from Nepean–Carleton when she says, "We've got a divide. We have the Ottawa hydro customers, and we have Hydro One." We have the exact same situation in Belleville, where we have Veridian power customers in the city of Belleville—and I nary get a complaint from people from Belleville about their hydro bill; it's very rare. But my constituency assistants are on the phone non-stop dealing with people who are struggling to find answers from Hydro One. They're going to the hydro ombudsman or our Ontario Ombudsman to try to get some answers, but they're not getting them from Hydro One. They would love the option to join Veridian. I would hope that maybe Veridian would pitch in and buy some of the shoulder areas around Belleville, like Thurlow, the north shore of Prince Edward county and other parts of the riding.

I would just like to congratulate the member for Nepean–Carleton. She's on the right track, and that's the discussion we need to be having here in the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments? The deputy leader of the third party opposition, the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You're very kind.

I'm happy to add my voice to the debate. I think my colleague from Nepean–Carleton actually touched on some very important points. One of the points that was also built on by our colleague from Windsor was that we all agree on this. This is something that all parties have actually spoken about, that all parties are committed to. We've heard from the Progressive Conservatives. They've said very clearly that their leader indicated that that was an initiative he wanted to implement. Our party has long since indicated this. Our previous leader mentioned that he's committed to phasing out coal. The

Liberal Party is also committed to this. So we have all parties committed to this issue. At the same time, if we have a government that's time-allocating bills because it wants to push through legislation quickly, then why are we putting in a piece of legislation that really, substantively, doesn't do anything? There's really no purpose for this type of legislation. I mean, it's something that we're committed to. There are comments and there are questions. My question is, please, someone explain to me in more detail why this bill is necessary. I think that's the question that is essentially one of the points that was brought up by the member from Nepean–Carleton in her speech.

In my closing seconds, I also want to point out that when we're talking about energy, when we're talking about phasing out coal-produced energy—let's look at the energy file in general. What we do know is that we're doing something absolutely wrong.

I think one of the first steps in the wrong direction was the privatization of energy, which, instead of bringing rates down, which many people thought it would do, brought rates up.

And now this government is committing to another privatization, which is also going to increase rates. Once that privatization is done, we can't go back from that. Once you privatize and sell it off, it's not like we can say we want a do-over. It's gone; it's done. So we need to seriously think that through before we do it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member.

Back to the member from Nepean–Carleton for final comments and questions.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My thanks go out to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh, of course the Minister of the Environment, my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings, and the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton for participating in the debate.

Speaker, what is instructive about the questions-and-comments section that we just had was that everyone was more focused on general energy policy: pricing in the province of Ontario, the issue we're going to have with Hydro One, with wind energy policy, as well as our nuclear mix and our other mixes; for example, natural gas and hydroelectric power. I think it's incumbent upon all of us to continue that discussion. I note that even though the minister was the sponsor of this three-page piece of legislation, which effectively has no real merit because it has been already initiated without legal means, he started having that conversation as well.

I do want to point out that in the province of Ontario today, we have the highest industrial power rates in North America. That is why it is critical for us to have that discussion, a lengthy one, in this assembly and in committee rooms, on where we go from here with energy pricing. I'll tell you why. We have seniors and middle-class families across Ontario making a decision between heating or eating. We have businesses in Ontario that are being forced out of this province to other jurisdictions—mostly neighbouring jurisdictions. Just ask my colleague

from Leeds–Grenville, when he sees business owners from the Great Lakes across from him, and the Thousand Islands, come across from St. Lawrence county in New York and try to poach businesses away from his jurisdiction because we have serious challenges.

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So I would ask the government: Please bring forward a wholesome debate for us to have on the most critical issue in Ontario today, which is energy policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, sit back and enjoy. I've got 20 minutes to talk on this bill, all four pages of it.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to this bill today, Bill 9, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act. It has already been debated in this House a number of times by some extraordinary speakers, so you'll have to forgive me if I repeat some of their words.

Listening to those debates, I think a few things are clear. Really, the thing that is most clear is that everyone really seems to enjoy the title of the bill. It sounds good. It's something you can say you passed. After all, who would be against cleaner air? The title of the bill allows you to give yourself a nice pat on the back.

The problem is, the title is almost as long as the bill. In two pages, this bill seeks to ban the use of coal for energy-creating purposes. I guess the reason it's so simple is because it's basically already done.

Reading over the debates from the last time and listening to speakers, one thing is clear: The Thunder Bay Generating Station was the last place to produce coal as a source of energy, and it closed down last year. As the speakers made clear in the debates around second reading, this bill doesn't really ban anything that is currently happening in the province of Ontario. The sentiment would have been great 10 years ago, but today it really is an afterthought.

The things that really relate in our minds with coal—the smog, the lung issues, how dirty it is—don't really exist anymore in this province. Quite frankly, that's a good thing. So we're here today again debating a bill around banning coal for energy use in Ontario, where it doesn't happen anymore.

This bill stands to make us feel good about ourselves and show we're getting things done, but in the end, it doesn't really do anything. I know most of the speakers mentioned that the last time this bill was debated, but here we are once again talking about this bill. Mr. Speaker, the last time, I believe members from each party indicated they supported it as well, so I'll go a little more into depth about the larger problem that is highlighted in this bill—it's something I'm glad the minister is here for: our environment and climate change.

When I'm here in the House, I really try to focus on key issues and hammer them, again and again, to try to get a message across. One of the things I'm constantly talking about in this House is the need to make sure that we give Ontario to our grandchildren just as good as it is

today, if not better than the Ontario we have today. This means a number of things. It means an Ontario where people can live affordably, and a province that is clean and sustainable. I'm happy to say this bill at least indicates that this government is interested in handing over a clean and sustainable Ontario.

In the last round of discussions around this bill, I know the member who was here earlier from St. Catharines was thanked for his work on this file. I'd like to give him that thanks as well. When this was a major concern some years ago, he was a strong voice on the subject, which is worth noting. The problem is, today we're legislating long after it was necessary.

Mr. Speaker, one of the major errors here is that this bill does nothing proactive. Like we have mentioned time and time again, the coal plants are already closed down. Representatives before us, especially the NDP members, fought hard to make sure that this province's environment was clean; and because of their efforts in part, these coal plants have stopped being a source of energy production.

Though coal burning was a cheaper source of energy, it just couldn't be kept up in this province. It isn't hard to find someone who suffers from asthma because of these pollutants—kids who can't breathe and who struggle to get air because of this sort of pollution. When we have to balance our children's health with some minor savings on energy costs, I think the choice is clear.

Our province is one of the most natural, beautiful places in the world. Take my riding, for example. Right on Lake Erie, you have Sherkston Shores. It's an incredible beach with a great community that has built up around it. The clear blue skies bring in visitors from the area and from around the world. It's the exact same story with the Crystal Beach community.

On the other end of my riding—as I'm sure most people here and my colleagues who are here today know—is Niagara-on-the-Lake, with its beautiful wine country. With some help from this government supporting our local businesses, our local wineries, the wine country is going to continue to grow.

It's easy to see why we need to preserve this. Keeping our attention focused on issues of the environment and climate change needs to be a priority.

One of the good things that will come from this bill is that it will be able to stop future coal plants from operating in Ontario—and I think that was what the minister tried to mention in his response. Like we've mentioned before, right now it does nothing, because the kinds of coal plants it bans do not operate today in the province of Ontario. So at least it does a little good. Should a government come in and want to start burning coal for energy, they'll need to come before this House and the elected representatives here first; and I think that's good.

As we've seen over the past few weeks, governments can do some unreasonable things when they are strapped for cash and have an energy sector in their sights. Right now, banning coal-burning plants might seem ridiculous,

but to save a few dollars here or a few dollars on budget, a government might be persuaded to do it.

Just as this government is preparing to sell energy assets that belong to the people of the province to make some extra cash, a government may turn to coal to save money. At the very least, this bill will put a stop to that and require consultation with this Legislature. Right now, the best thing this bill does is prepare for a future situation that may or may not come. Other than that, it's a pat on our backs and nothing else.

There are far more important things we could be dealing with this afternoon rather than legislating a problem that doesn't exist. I'm not sure why this bill was prioritized by this government, but it was. Right now, we have teachers on strike in Durham. We have auto workers fearing for their jobs. In Niagara, we have home care nurses who are on strike because their employer won't recognize their union and won't pay them proper compensation. We could be talking about these issues, about the role the government could play. We could be moving to protect their jobs and secure their futures, talking about issues like that instead of passing a bill that bans something that isn't currently happening in the great province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, while we have the time today, we need to make sure that the discussion of this bill does not revolve around an issue that is already closed. Let's use this time to highlight what this bill means, what it represents and how it can be a force for good. Like my colleague the member for Toronto—Danforth mentioned last time, there is a major issue around climate change. It's good to see this government put forward a bill that deals with major polluters and major contributors to climate change, but there are many reasons that more needs to be done beyond this bill.

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We're confronted with a massive challenge: the challenge of climate change. We hear many big things about this issue, but I'd like to just bring it home for a minute. We're seeing wild changes in climates around this province and around the continent. In places like Alaska, they're seeing record heat spikes. In my riding of Niagara Falls, we're seeing some of our coldest winters on record. I believe February of this year was the coldest February ever recorded in Niagara Falls. These weather patterns have a very real effect on us here in Ontario. The biggest indicator that proves this is our hydro bills.

In my riding, we're right next to Niagara Falls, one of the biggest sources of hydroelectric power in the entire world. At one time, Niagara Falls was able to produce cheap energy that fed our booming manufacturing sector in Niagara. It makes sense. We're right next door to massive generators. There was no line loss; it was delivered right there. Now people in my riding are having a hard time paying their hydro bills. Each month, more and more money is coming out of their pockets and going towards heating their homes.

There are two things at play here, and both are man-made; one is fluctuating weather patterns. When you

have unpredictable weather and cold winters, it means that people need to use energy to heat their homes. This isn't a choice. If people want to make it through the winter, they need to heat their homes. The other thing is the high cost of hydro in this province as a result of government policy. We see the government taking serious note of climate change; that's a good thing and something that is long overdue. We need them to also take note of hydro rates and what they can do to lower them.

I encourage the members opposite to think of the seniors who aren't getting more money as the months go by, but who keep seeing their hydro bills rising. Try to ask yourself: Is it right for a senior who has worked their whole life for this province to choose between heating their home and eating?

Hydro is an urgent issue. It's an emergency. Yes, we can take action on climate change, and yes, we can take action on hydro bills. Both can happen at the same time, and both need to happen.

Mr. Speaker, there's another major factor to all this that makes my riding so important with regard to the intent of this bill. When the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change stood and spoke to this bill, he mentioned time and time again legislation around emissions. He mentioned the lack of legislation at the federal level. He mentioned the work being done in California on emissions. He mentioned how Ontario can lead the world in reducing emissions.

Banning coal emissions is one way to do it. Certainly, if you have no coal-burning facilities, we'll be reducing emissions. I think that makes sense to those who are listening. That has already happened, so we don't need a bill for that, but we can agree it's good to reduce those emissions.

If this government is so committed to reducing emissions, why will they not look at the biggest factor in my riding: around transportation? Every single day, we have 50,000 commuters leave the Niagara region and head towards the GTA along the GO Transit line. That's 50,000 commuters. Even if half carpooled, which is an optimistic figure, we'd still have 25,000 cars on the road every day going down the QEW, heading towards Toronto. That's 25,000 cars polluting and adding to the problem of climate change. That's thousands of vehicles that are creating uncontrollable weather that contributes to rising hydro costs. If this bill is meant to signal this government's willingness to address climate change, then start right there.

Like it has been mentioned in this House numerous times, it is a bit cheaper to burn coal. So if the government is willing to forgo some money in order to protect our environment, then why would they not invest money that they would see a return on that will also reduce emissions? Emissions would be reduced by just removing the cars from the roadway. This doesn't even touch on the reduction of emissions that would follow not having large transport trucks idling in traffic for hours, which you see all the time when you drive down the QEW or the 401, or the people who commute within the region.

The honourable Minister of the Environment and Climate Change is our former Minister of Transportation. He knows how badly Niagara wants the GO train. Just reading through his words in this House, you can tell he is dedicated to the environment and committed to being a world leader in the fight against climate change. You'll also quickly figure out how intelligent the minister is, so nothing I'm saying here should come as a surprise to the minister.

There's a very clear tourism case for the GO train. There's a business case for the GO train that has been made, and it's going to be made in depth at the end of this month. But there is still something else as well. There's a clear environmental case for the GO train coming from Toronto to Niagara and Niagara to Toronto.

The people of this province want affordable public transportation, and in Niagara they're doing everything they can to make this clear. Think about that. We have an entire region, led by a grassroots movement, calling for an environmentally friendly solution to traffic. They're practically begging this government to follow through on its commitment and give them something that helps alleviate the emissions problem, yet we continue to hear nothing.

This government says it wants to be a leader in the world when it comes to climate change. It says it wants the world to follow in its footsteps with bills like these and its actions. What is the world to say when it sees an entire region continually asking the Premier and her ministers for an environmentally friendly solution to a transit problem? People who want to work in Toronto and live in Niagara or live in Toronto and work in Niagara have no choice but to buy a car and commute. They want an alternative. They want to put forward a case for an alternative, an environmentally friendly alternative, and yet the government continues to force them to purchase an automobile and make the drive. What will other jurisdictions say to us when they see that?

Let me say that Bill 9 is an opportunity—an opportunity to be an example to the world, to set off a chain of events that would see other jurisdictions and other countries also ban coal-burning facilities. But there's so much more we can do. By offering an alternative to the people who travel the QEW between Toronto and Niagara Falls, we can show the world how to reduce emissions, provide

better public service and even see an economic development boost, all in the same action.

We mentioned the great work the member from St. Catharines did on the environmental portfolio and how strong a voice he was against coal burning. We're highlighting that now after the coal-burning facilities have closed. Perhaps we could have reduced emissions sooner had we worked on the idea sooner. It's the exact same story with GO trains. The same member is advocating for an environmentally friendly solution to transit issues. Let's not wait 10 years to get this done; let's get it done now, in the year 2015.

There are other options this government has available to fight climate change as well. One is the auto industry. That may sound strange at first, because we know that cars create emissions, but working with the auto industry we can actually fight climate change.

General Motors was one of the first car manufacturers to commit to making environmentally friendly, fuel-efficient cars. Fuel-efficient cars are good for the people of Ontario. On one hand, it helps to reduce emissions that cause climate change; and on the other hand, it softens the blow of unnecessarily high gas prices in this province.

It's all related: the automotive industry, employment and fighting climate change. When companies like General Motors commit to making environmentally friendly cars here in Ontario, we should support them. Right now, we know it's hard to compete with the costs of building a car in other areas of the continent, but if we offer the right incentives, we can keep these car companies here, protecting tens of thousands of auto jobs right here in the province of Ontario. That is a win-win-win. With the government's support, car manufacturers will be able to experiment with cars that have far lower emissions and keep jobs in the province of Ontario.

Unfortunately, my time has run out. Thank you very much for listening. Take care.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the member from Niagara for his contribution to the debate. The opportunity for questions and comments will be provided at a later date and time.

Since it is now 6 o'clock, this Legislature stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Wednesday 22 April 2015

Mercredi 22 avril 2015



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 22 April 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 22 avril 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR JOBS AND PROSPERITY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'INFRASTRUCTURE AU SERVICE DE L'EMPLOI ET DE LA PROSPÉRITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 16, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2015 / Projet de loi 6, Loi édictant la Loi de 2015 sur l'infrastructure au service de l'emploi et de la prospérité.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When we last discussed this issue the member from Newmarket–Aurora had the floor. We are now into questions and comments.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to address the speech of the member from Newmarket–Aurora. We all know how important infrastructure is to our economy and how it translates into jobs when those infrastructure projects are going to be initiated and completed. So it's great that the government is bringing forth legislation, but what we really need to see is a concrete, laid-out plan as to what they're going to do with infrastructure here in the province of Ontario, because we hear the clarion call from municipalities all over Ontario, how we are all struggling with an infrastructure deficit.

This government has a history over the past 12 years of doing things on paper—because that's what these bills are; they're on paper—and then not following through with them. We'll have to see what happens with this bill and see if it's an exception to some of the other pieces of legislation that have not been followed through with in the past.

In my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, one of the biggest challenges we have is we have the Trans-Canada Highway going through it but it's not four lanes throughout the riding. We need to see some more action on that. I know it's under progress right now, the Highway 417 expansion through Arnprior and now moving beyond Arnprior, but it is painfully slow. People in my riding want to see some real, concrete—no pun intended;

asphalt will work, too—action on this particular project because it is of vital importance, not only from a traffic safety point of view, which is clearly paramount and should be and always is for the ministry, but also as an economic development tool for my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. We'd like to see some further action on that as quickly as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further questions or comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Infrastructure is one of the pillars that drives the economy. People need infrastructure to get around to their work, their appointments, everyday life. There were many promises made by this Liberal government with regard to infrastructure and transit. KW, or Kitchener–Waterloo: They were promised a bullet train. Niagara Falls, the member from Niagara Falls: They were promised transit as well, GO train services. London–Fanshawe: The city of London, which is a great city, is facing transportation concerns, and we were promised a bullet train. All these promises that came about—there was never a plan of how to fund them. So we're very interested to know how the government has pre-empted promises without a plan to actually fund transit.

We don't believe in privatizing hydro as a way to finance transit. We've had many suggestions to this government of how to do that. One of those was closing corporate tax loopholes. That was a billion dollars of funding that could actually go into projects for transit and infrastructure. So it's disappointing that this bill doesn't have that vision of how to actually enforce what it's proposing.

Again, it's a bill that's got an idea. The idea is great—when it comes to ideas, the Liberals are full of them—but we'd like to see some funding attached to those ideas that's actually concrete and not privatizing hydro, where people will end up paying higher rates in their hydro, which people don't want in my riding of London–Fanshawe and people don't want in London. They want to keep our public facility services like hydro public so that we have oversight and transparency and they're not going to be gouged for a necessity of life.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: Just to do my two minutes here: It's just noteworthy, if you compare Ontario's money on the ground, in terms of infrastructure, to the incredible sleight of hand by the federal budget yesterday—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's not their responsibility, Michael. You know that.

Mr. Mike Colle: They committed \$1 billion for all of Canada for transit. We just announced \$1.6 billion for the light rail line between Brampton and Mississauga. So I don't know how Hamilton or anybody is going to get any money. It's \$1 billion for all of Canada, whereas we're putting \$130 billion over the next 10 years. So we've got no partner in Ottawa.

We've got the Trans-Canada Highway system. They spend no money for the Trans-Canada—did you know that, Mr. Speaker? The Trans-Canada Highway: There's no federal money in it. So it's all a matter of—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock. Point of order.

Mr. Randy Hillier: We are speaking to Bill 6, not the federal budget. We should be keeping our comments to Bill 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): If I feel that the member from Eglinton–Lawrence is wandering, I'll certainly inform him. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. Mike Colle: About our infrastructure in Ontario—one day I'd like to see an opposition member in the Tories actually say something nearly critical of their federal cousins. Just once I'd like to see one member.

The fact is, the people of Ontario spend and get most of their infrastructure money, almost 95%, from the provincial coffers. We need a partner if we're going to go ahead with helping all these infrastructure projects that are needed across Ontario. I know this really hurts the puppets over here who always defend their friends in Ottawa. For once, stand up for the people of Ontario and our infrastructure needs. We need sewers, roads, highways repaired; we need public transit, and they are silent, always standing up for their federal cousins. Once in a while, stand up and tell the truth about being—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Comments?
0910

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaking of telling the truth—I know that would be unusual for that side, Speaker—let me tell you what we actually saw in the budget. Last year in the budget we had a sentence that told us exactly what they intend to do with their asset sale. It's not going into infrastructure whatsoever. In the budget, it said they “may” put a “portion” into the Trillium Trust. Our party brought forward amendments that said you “must” put it “all” into the Trillium Trust. First the government voted down the word “must,” so now they only have “may” put it in, and then they voted down the word “all,” and they left the word “portion.” So instead of all the money going into the Trillium Trust, now they may put some or none of it in, but they don't have to put all of it in and they don't have to put any of it in. That's what these people voted for. That's the amendment.

Speaker, we took it one step further, and we said, “We want an amendment that has the Auditor General looking, within 90 days of the sale of any asset, and reporting to this Legislature what was sold, how much was

received and where the money went.” These guys voted it down; that's what they did. That is the lack of transparency and openness. That's what is happening to the sale of GM shares; that's what is happening to this fire sale of Hydro One; that's what is happening to their planned sale of the LCBO. It's all about squeezing money out to try to balance the budget. It's not about infrastructure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Newmarket–Aurora has two minutes.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'm thankful to hear comments from members from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, London–Fanshawe, Eglinton–Lawrence and Nipissing.

I think my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence hit the nail on the head in terms of the sleight-of-hand federal budget. I'm not going to spend any more time on that, because I think the public understands that budget for what it is.

I do want to say that this bill, Bill 6, represents our government's priority for building Ontario up by investing in people's talents and skills, building new public infrastructure, and creating a dynamic business climate. We know that there will be \$130 billion spent on public infrastructure over the next 10 years. That, obviously, is one of the biggest spends on infrastructure in the history of this province. If we look back at the history of this province, that is one of the key things that has made Ontario great. The building of the 400-series highways, the building of the railroads: They've all worked to make Ontario very prosperous, and we need to continue to invest in those. It's unfortunate that the bulk of that falls on the shoulders of Ontario taxpayers.

The Conference Board of Canada has told us that every dollar that Ontario invests in public infrastructure raises Ontario's GDP by \$1.14 in the near term, and our own studies have shown that that expands to \$3.10 long-term, so it's a significant investment going forward.

Bill 6, if passed, would require our government and future governments to regularly prepare long-term infrastructure plans so that we don't get caught in the deficit we're in today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's a pleasure to be here today and to speak and debate on An Act to enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act. I want to just read the very first section:

“Purpose

“(1) The purpose of this act is to establish mechanisms to encourage principled, evidence-based and strategic long-term infrastructure planning that supports job creation and training opportunities,” and on and on.

So this law is now going to compel the province—this government—to establish evidence-based, strategic long-term infrastructure planning. That clearly implies that they have not been engaged in evidence-based, strategic long-term planning for infrastructure in the past. I think the evidence shows that that is indeed true. They have not been involved in long-term planning—not long-term

planning that is for the benefit of the people of Ontario; maybe long-term planning for the benefit of the people of the Liberal Party, but certainly not for the people of Ontario.

You would think that we've had responsible government here in what is now Ontario since the 1830s, and you would think that somewhere in those mere 200 years governments have actually been engaged in some strategic long-term infrastructure, that this is not just an epiphany that's happened today with the Ontario Liberals, that they have now found evidence-based strategic planning where all other governments in those mere 200 years did not understand or comprehend or implement long-term strategic planning.

I would say to you, Speaker, and to this House, that I think the 401 was a long-term strategic plan. I would think the Adam Beck generating station at Niagara Falls was probably a long-term strategic planning project. I could go on and on. This is not something new, but what is new and what is evident to me in my time in this House is the cavalier and casual regard for the law that this Liberal government does provide in its abiding of its own laws. What people will notice in Bill 6 is that there are no enforcement or compliance mechanisms. Nothing compels the government to actually do anything in Bill 6, other than it being the law. If they had a conscience, they would follow the law, but we know that most people would be suspicious if they do have a conscience.

Let me take you back, Speaker, and this House, to the deleted emails. Deleting the emails was unlawful. It was against the law. However, there was no consequence in the legislation for failure to abide by the law. So the Liberal government could and indeed did violate the law but not bear any consequence for that violation or that offence to the law, that offence to the people of this province, that offence to this Legislature—scot-free.

In this bill, there are no enforcement or compliance mechanisms. So if the Liberal government goes like this tomorrow and throws it in the trashcan and doesn't ever do anything about it, nothing will happen. It will be somewhat like what we found out during estimates committee last fall when we had the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Energy there, and a host of ministers came in to have their ministries scrutinized for their appropriations for the year. Time and time and time again it was revealed to us, when we asked questions of these ministers and their senior staff, when we asked questions why the annual reports were not filed by their agencies—and, again, these were statutory obligations, included in a law just like this. The government and the ministers have an obligation to file annual reports. However, they weren't filed.

The minister seemed to be somewhat perplexed, even though it was his responsibility to ensure the agencies filed the annual reports. But there was no consequence. Some of those agencies were up to three and four years behind in filing their annual reports. But the minister didn't really—I shouldn't say "the minister"; the ministers, because we had a number of them in estimates com-

mittee. They just said, "They're late. They're late. We'd like to abide by the law, we'd like to fulfill our statutory obligations, but we just don't know how to do it," or, "It's just not that important because there is no consequence for us being lazy or cavalier or disregarding the law."

0920

We saw the same thing with the filing of expenses. We saw the same thing. Many, many, many people have an obligation to this House and to the public to file their expenses online. It was a law that was just passed in the 40th Parliament. In the 40th Parliament we passed a law that said that all these people have to file their expenses online. However, there was no consequence in that bill if they didn't file online and in a timely fashion.

So once again, we see this government repeating its past failures time and time and time again. They put a puppy in the window; they get some people to talk and to be distracted about this new-found crusade of the Liberal Party to act on evidence, to act on science-based and strategic planning, but guess what? "We don't really have to. It's just a law."

What we've seen very clearly is that this Liberal government believes everybody must abide by the law except themselves. When they craft a law that is to be applied to the general public, they don't forget about enforcement and compliance. They put in a host of mechanisms to ensure compliance and to enforce it: warrantless entry into homes, warrantless entry into businesses, compelling of documentation. But in their own bill, they leave enforcement and compliance absent. Why is that? In the questions and comments maybe we'll get the member from St. Catharines to explain to this House why enforcement and compliance are not mandatory for government but only for the subjects.

I come from a line of advocacy for democratic institutions that say their foundation is that "neither prince nor pauper is above or beneath the law." Clearly, this Liberal government believes their princes are above the law, but the paupers will feel the weight of their enforcement and compliance each and every time.

So once again, after 12 years in government, this government has now decided it's going to be thoughtful about infrastructure projects. Does anybody believe that? Does anybody actually believe that now, after 12 years of wasteful mismanagement, after 12 years of maladministration, of scandals, they have now found and turned a new leaf and they are going to be thoughtful and methodical in conducting business with regard for evidence and science? It'll be interesting. I'll be watching for the next three years. I'll be watching to see if they ever actually table this plan that they say is now mandatory in this law.

If I'm still here, I'm going to be waiting for that day when it says that this plan is going to be tabled. I'm going to stand up in this House and I'm going to ask the question: Why not? Because it won't be. The track record demonstrates time and time and time again that this Liberal government does not have any regard for the laws that are based for itself.

We'll see what the member from St. Catharines says on that day. He's not saying much today; he probably won't be saying much that day, either, just, "We didn't get around to it. It wasn't that important at the time. We thought it was important way back when, in 2015, but it's not important now"—because they're that good, that they don't have to apply to the law.

But I want to also say, going through the bill, that they lay out these broad, general frameworks of what projects will be subject to this long-term plan. And then they put forward a host of exemptions and a host of clauses which allow them to essentially exempt any and all projects from being involved in the long-term evidence-based strategic plan. And I want to hear during questions and comments: Why are they exempting so many projects from the obligation to be included in the long-term plan? I'm really looking forward for somebody on the government side to explain that to me. Explain to me why there are no consequences. Explain to me why there's no enforcement. Explain to me why there's no compliance. And explain to me why it is full of exemptions that you could drive a Liberal Party bus through. That's what is in this bill.

After we saw the events of the last week, with this Liberal government making deals with Ed Clark and other people outside of this House, beyond the view of this Legislature, I wonder what else we've got in store with this, what actually is going to be included in the evidence-based strategic plan that actually comes before this House. Or will it be done outside of the House—

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Burlington, a point of order.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I would ask that the honourable member stick to the topic at hand. I know that he is prone to talking about other things, as we all are from time to time, but I would ask that he do so in the interests of people watching the discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I've been listening carefully, and I think the member has been addressing the compliance and lack of enforcement around his discussion, so I don't think he's wandered too far yet, but if he does, I'll certainly let him know.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Solid interjections would be—if they maybe had read the bill themselves, they would know that what I'm talking about is the bill. There is no enforcement and compliance, and I was making the contrast of how we've seen this government operate when there are no enforcement or compliance mechanisms on them. We saw that, as I said, last week with their making deals with the Ed Clark panel outside of this House. There was no enforcement or compliance.

There's a tradition, there's a convention, in our parliamentary institution that these things ought to be discussed and first announced in the Legislature. But it is a convention. It is a tradition. It's a tradition that some people don't respect very much, but it's a tradition that others have a high regard for. And we've seen that this government does not have a high regard for traditions or con-

ventions. If there's an opportunity to skate, they'll skate, and this bill, Bill 6, allows them to skate ever more. It allows them to skate around traditions and conventions. It allows them to skate around obligations to the people of this province. It allows them to rag the puck and not be forthcoming in a complete fashion about what they're doing with infrastructure projects.

0930

I've put out a challenge to the Liberal benches if they can explain to me in the questions and comments why there are no enforcement and compliance mechanisms in this bill. That's number one. Why is there no enforcement? Just like the deleted email offence that they engaged in that had no consequence, why are they repeating the same mistake here? And why have they created so many exemptions? So many projects can be exempted from this bill.

Finally, over the last 12 years—as I stated at the outset, "The purpose of this act is to establish mechanisms to encourage"—I guess that's the one: encourage; not to make mandatory. It's just to encourage the Liberal government, give them a pat on the back: "Maybe if you just go this way a little bit to evidence-based and strategic long-term infrastructure planning."

I'd like to see the Liberal backbenchers encourage themselves to do better, encourage themselves to walk the walk and actually put some enforcement mechanisms into Bill 6 when it does come to committee. I challenge you: Put enforcement mechanisms in this bill during second reading at committee. I'd like to see it.

Just like the deleted emails, if some minister down the road doesn't table the reports like the convention asks, like the bill requires, what will be the consequence? Will the minister be forced to step down? Will the minister have to vacate his seat? What mechanisms will we require to ensure that the minister does his job? Because from what I've seen in estimates committee over these years, none of them—very, very few of them—take their responsibilities of the law very seriously, and have little regard for both the law and the traditions of representative democracy in this Legislature.

Thank you very much. I'll be listening keenly for the questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a privilege and a pleasure to stand up on behalf of the great people across my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin. I listened very closely to the comments from the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. My, that's a long one.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It is long.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I thought mine was long.

He talked quite a bit at length in regard to the lack of enforcement and the lack of consequences for a bill that, quite frankly, is obvious. Wouldn't you as a municipal leader, wouldn't you as a community member, wouldn't you as an Ontarian already think that your government is thinking and taking action about having long-term infrastructure investment? I would think that's a direct role of

government; that's what they were doing. But in the infinite wisdom of this Liberal government we now need a law to think about what we're supposed to do. It goes back to something that I've been using for a very long time when talking about this government: We're developing a plan to have a plan to implement a plan. It's a lot of planning but no action.

We see a lot of what is coming from this government as nice media front-line announcements—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Puppies in the window.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Puppies in the window—but really little substance behind them.

What I would like to see in this long-term plan is—I'm glad to see that there is going to be some consideration for what's referred to as a bullet train. What about northern Ontario? We've lost our ONTC. You've taken away our buses. We're losing our infrastructure. I hope that's part of your long-term plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm pleased to stand up in the House today. It's a great privilege, on behalf of the citizens of Burlington, to talk about long-term infrastructure.

I know I'm not the only member of this House who has had their mayor talk to them significantly about the need for long-term, predictable infrastructure funding and planning.

I was new to this place, but I was at OGRA/ROMA, and as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry I had the great privilege of meeting with municipal leaders from across the province, as I did last year at AMO. It was interesting to hear the comments from the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington—might I just say: That is a long name, isn't it? I heard mayors from his riding come in and talk about exactly that: the need for partnership with government, the need for infrastructure funding, the need for predictability and the need for a funding partner who is going to give them the certainty of a long-term plan for Ontario's infrastructure investments that are going to serve the needs of their communities.

While I come from a riding that's largely urban, our rural infrastructure needs are just as critical, and I'm happy to say that this legislation, Bill 6, will provide that kind of clarity, sustainability and greater predictability in infrastructure policy to keep our province economically competitive.

Internationally, companies are looking to invest in Ontario. In fact, we're the province with the largest amount of foreign direct investment. Why is that? Because people enjoy investing here. But they're going to do it even more and with more regularity if we have the kind of infrastructure and predictable funding for infrastructure that's going to attract their business to come here.

I'm enjoying the debate, I look forward to more of it, but I ask that all members of the House support this important bill because it's going to serve our municipalities and our communities well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Chatham-Kent—Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Bill 6, An Act to enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2014. It sounds great for what it implies, but who wouldn't say that in the province of Ontario infrastructure is desperately needed? We on our side agree that it is needed. But my one question is this: Where will the money come from? Where will it come from? They talk about a three-year plan, a five-year plan, a 10-year plan and so on. It is our hope on this side that there will be a different government in three years' time.

You think about the scandals that this government has been involved in over the last three and a half years or so, or maybe a little bit longer: I talk about the gas plants—they're tired of hearing about it; we're tired of hearing about it—Ornge, eHealth scandals, OPP investigations, all of that. That costs money, and it was all on the backs of the taxpayers.

I support openness and transparency, I truly do, but my fear is that what this government says versus what they do are two very different things. It sounds wonderful, but my concern is: Will they really follow through?

We'll support this bill. It's our recommendation—we'll support the bill at second reading. But trust me, there has to be a number of amendments put into this which will, in fact, strengthen transparency and accountability.

I look at partisanship—and partisanship is alive and well inside this Legislature. My concern is simply this: I don't like the “us versus them” attitude, that everything they say is great and everything we say is bad or vice versa. I get that; I don't like it. I really believe, though, that there are good, caring, sincere people represented in here by all parties, but my concern is that this may be going against some of their values and principles, and therefore I have a serious concern.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to follow on the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. I must say that the member probably has some of the largest election signs in Ontario with that name.

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As my other colleagues have said, I can hear a whole lot of sizzle but there's a mammoth shortage of steak when it comes to this bill. I don't think it's an offensive bill; I don't think it's going to end the world if it's passed. But the government has the power to plan for infrastructure now. It provides the bucks, so it can say to any municipality or hospital or university, “These are the principles you've got to follow when you're doing infrastructure planning. When you're making an investment for the people of this province, it has to be infrastructure that makes sense, that's beautifully designed etc. It has to be climate-resilient. It can't offend our environmental principles.” I don't think those are bad things to say, but they already have the power to do that.

Speaker, we do have a problem with this government relying on public-private partnerships to build infrastructure. The Auditor General said that we've wasted \$8 billion in roughly the last decade because we've overpaid private consortiums to eliminate risk. At what cost? Apparently eight billion wasted dollars—\$8 billion that could make a difference in this province. People would notice an \$8-billion project landing just about anywhere in Ontario.

Instead of dealing with where we're hemorrhaging money, what we've got is an announcement of sizzle. I understand this is a government that wants to look good. It brings forward a bill, and people ask, "What about infrastructure?" "We're bringing in a law. We're dealing with it." Speaker, you can't build a bridge with laws.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington has two minutes.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I just want to thank the members for their comments. However, I put out a challenge for what I see are deficiencies in this bill; they weren't addressed. They weren't even recognized by the Liberal member. Nobody has challenged my statements about this bill, about its shortcomings.

This bill is not about infrastructure projects. This bill is about imposing obligations on the government to develop plans and to report those plans to this institution. That's what this bill is about. Nothing in this bill says we're going to build more bridges or we're going to build more hockey rinks or hospitals. It doesn't say we're going to have more relationships or long-term planning or funding for municipalities. This bill is about putting safeguards in place—that's what the bill says—so that this assembly understands what the government's plan in the long term for infrastructure is. That's what the bill is: to report back to this House. However, there are no consequences for its failure to report back to this House. There are no consequences for failure to develop the plan at all.

I put that challenge out earlier; I'm still seeking an answer to my questions on this bill. Why is there no enforcement? Why is there no compliance? Why are there so many exemptions for projects to be outside of Bill 6?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is always an honour to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the people I represent in London West, who are counting on me to bring their concerns forward to inform the development of good legislation and good policy.

I'm especially pleased today to join the debate on Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act. This is a bill that was introduced in this Legislature way back in July. It was actually one of the first bills that was brought forward by the new Liberal government following the election, and it has had a very short period of time for debate since it was introduced.

I'm glad to participate in this debate because, surprisingly, here at Queen's Park, MPPs don't get a lot of op-

portunities to talk about jobs and prosperity. There are actually very few bills that the Liberals have brought forward that contribute to getting our economy moving, that will create jobs for Ontarians and especially for young people.

There are, of course, bills like the Fighting Fraud and Reducing Automobile Insurance Rates Act and the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act that will create jobs and prosperity for the insurance industry and for financial institutions, but there are very few pieces of legislation we've talked about here that address the needs of people who are underemployed, who are unable to find employment or who are looking to enter the labour market for the first time.

I do want to point out that my own private member's bill, the Protecting Interns and Creating a Learning Economy Act, would have done just that. Unlike the bill that we are debating today, my private member's bill did address the needs of vulnerable workers and it did include measures to boost productivity and grow the economy. I'm still waiting for that bill to be considered at committee and I hope it will be soon because I'm looking forward to debating it in the House at third reading and I know other members of my caucus are also looking forward to that.

The bill that we're debating here today, Bill 6, is similar to several other bills that have been introduced by the Liberals this Parliament. It is another fairly innocuous fluff bill. It has a grand title but relatively little content. It is more feel-good legislation, more spin than substance, and it includes no enforcement mechanisms that will ensure that it actually has an impact on some of the most pressing issues that are facing Ontarians today.

The primary purpose of Bill 6 is to encourage long-term infrastructure spending for the government of Ontario and the broader public sector by setting out specific principles that have to be followed and requiring the minister to prepare a 10-year infrastructure plan. Now, I said "principles that have to be followed"; I should have said "principles that have to be considered" because there is no requirement, actually, that these principles be adhered to.

Certainly, there's no question about the importance of long-term planning. Infrastructure spending is not a tap to be turned on and off depending on the political will of the day, nor is it a temporary solution to economic downturn to be discontinued once the economy improves. In fact, it's this kind of thinking, this kind of short-termism and ad hoc-ism, that has created the huge infrastructure deficit we see in this province today, which sits at around \$100 billion. Without a long-term infrastructure plan, what we have seen are many of our assets across this province in the communities we represent falling into serious disrepair and decay.

In London, in my community, the most recent State of Infrastructure Report indicates a current infrastructure funding gap of \$52 million, which could grow to \$466 million under current investment plans. Londoners are understandably concerned about the fact that 7% of our

city's assets are listed in very poor condition. They are still functioning, perhaps, but the level of service they provide is well below par.

At the same time, Londoners are excited and energized by the work that's under way on Shift London, which is an initiative to develop a rapid transit system for our community. An environmental assessment has started, and we will certainly be looking to the province to support this major infrastructure investment in London's growth and prosperity.

I should say that Londoners are intrigued. We recognize the potential of high-speed rail but we're not exactly holding our breath to see this initiative move forward, given the lack of planning that went into this hasty Liberal pre-election goodie announcement.

Of course, properly planned life cycle infrastructure is important, but, as has been said earlier this morning, the government doesn't need a new law in order to undertake this kind of long-term infrastructure planning. There's absolutely nothing stopping the government, if it wanted to, to proceed with the development of 10-year, 20-year, even 50-year infrastructure plans for this province. However, they did decide they need a law, so now I want to turn to specific aspects of the legislation that they have proposed.

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First, in looking at the definition of infrastructure, I couldn't help but notice one very significant exclusion. The infrastructure covered by Bill 6 includes highways, bridges, bicycle paths, drinking water systems, hospitals, courthouses and schools—basically any physical structure or facility through which a public service is provided to Ontarians.

What the bill doesn't cover is publicly owned electricity infrastructure, nor does it cover Hydro One or OPG. The cynic in me wonders if there was perhaps a deliberate omission by the Liberals when they wrote this legislation last summer. Maybe they knew all along what they were planning to do with the sell-off of Hydro One and maybe they knew how awkward it would be to have this bill debated in the Legislature while they were in the process of dismantling our public electricity system. How hypocritical this would make them appear, because there is no way that the privatization of Hydro One could be justified according to the principles that are set out in this bill.

There are nine planning principles that are described in Bill 6 that the government of Ontario as well as all broader-sector entities are required to consider when making infrastructure decisions.

First, take a long-term view and be mindful of demographic and economic trends.

Second, take budgets and fiscal plans into account.

Third, identify infrastructure priorities.

Fourth, ensure that core public services like health care and education continue to be provided.

Fifth, promote economic competitiveness, productivity, job creation and training opportunities.

Sixth, make innovative use of technologies.

Seventh, plans should be evidence-based and transparent. I will come back to that principle in a moment.

Eighth, be mindful of provincial and municipal plans or strategies; for example, those developed under the Planning Act or the Metrolinx Act.

Ninth, minimize impact on the environment, and design infrastructure to be resilient to climate change.

Speaker, I can tell you that, as a former school board trustee—and school boards will be covered by the act and be expected to take these principles into account—I would have loved to be able to make decisions about managing school assets that were based on principles and not just budget concerns.

Here in the NDP caucus, we have three former school board trustees. All of us were involved in very, very difficult decisions about school closures. These decisions were forced on school boards as the only possible option we could take, directly as a result of provincial underfunding. In these cases, the only principle that school boards were able to apply was principle number two—budgets and fiscal plans—because in all of these school board debates it was basically impossible to take the long-term view. The provincial funding model left school boards unable to maintain assets for long-term community benefit and for future generations of students.

If this bill goes to committee, I will be very interested in hearing from school boards how it will affect their infrastructure planning process and how it will inform their accommodation review process.

I want to speak in a little bit more detail about principle number seven, which is ensuring that infrastructure plans are evidence-based and transparent, which seems highly ironic in light of the Auditor General's report last December. The Auditor General revealed that the government spent an additional \$8 billion on public-private partnerships than they would have spent if the projects had been financed and managed by the public sector using traditional procurement methods and private construction.

These projects were undertaken as P3s because the government claimed that the P3 model allowed them to transfer large amounts of risk to the private sector. In fact, they claimed that the risks would have been five times greater if they had used public sector procurement compared to P3s. But as the Auditor General points out, they provided absolutely no evidence to support this claim. After confirming with external consultants like Deloitte, the auditor's report stated that there "is no empirical data supporting the key assumptions used by Infrastructure Ontario to assign costs to specific risks." Basically, the assumptions the government made about risk transfer, the costs that they calculated to compare the P3 model to traditional models, were fabricated. They were pulled out of thin air. They were cooking the books, so to speak, to provide a rationale for directing tens of billions of dollars of public spending—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order: the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, standing order 23(h) prohibits the making of an allegation. You cannot say indirectly what you cannot say directly. "Cooking the books" is an accepted expression for "theft." That's over the line.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I agree with that point of order. The member will withdraw that statement.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Continue.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: In addition to the absence of empirical data, the other part of principle 7 about transparency in decision-making is also sorely lacking at Infrastructure Ontario. They have refused to make public the detailed cost calculations from any specific value-for-money assessments, and they have refused to make public even the generic risk assessment matrices and assumptions they use.

Certainly, this raises serious questions about the basis on which P3 decisions are being made. What we see at Infrastructure Ontario is not evidence-based infrastructure planning and investment. It is evidence-free planning and investment. It is not transparency, as would be required by principle number 7.

With \$130 billion to be spent on public infrastructure over the next decade, it would be a very good thing if principle number 7 prevented more money being wasted on overpriced P3s. But as we see the Liberals rushing to privatize whatever they can get their hands on, I suspect we are unlikely to see an end to their commitment to the P3 model, despite the evidence that shows that this is a bad deal for Ontario.

The second part of Bill 6 requires the minister to develop a long-term infrastructure plan, to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly and published on the government of Ontario website. The first plan is to be tabled in 2018, if the act passes this year, and subsequent plans every five years thereafter. But while the minister is expected to consider the planning principles set out in the bill, there is no requirement that the principles actually be incorporated into the plan.

The plan must include an inventory of government infrastructure assets, as well as a strategy on how to address anticipated infrastructure requirements through improvements or new assets over the next 10 years. Basically, the long-term plan must show how infrastructure investments and maintenance will be funded.

Again, when we look at the sell-off of Hydro One, one certainly sees the value of this approach, because instead of keeping plans secret from Ontarians, people would have known, when they went to the polls last June, that the Liberals planned to privatize Hydro One and drive up electricity bills, in order to fund GTA transit.

So New Democrats certainly see the value of this provision of the bill and support this direction.

Bill 6 also sets out the criteria to prioritize and evaluate new infrastructure projects, including alignment of the project with existing provincial or municipal plans;

capital and operating costs; and economic impacts, such as long-term return on investment and implications for tax-based growth.

Here I see a missed opportunity to incorporate criteria related to community benefits agreements, like that negotiated by Metrolinx for the Eglinton subway. This was, of course, after the Toronto Community Benefits Network fought hammer-and-nail to get Metrolinx to sign.

I was at the Good Jobs Summit last fall. I heard the Premier say that she supports community benefits agreements for major infrastructure projects and would have liked to see that commitment reflected in this bill.

Community benefits agreements are legally binding contracts that detail the specific benefits a community must receive from a given development project, such as equitable hiring practices, funding for training, neighbourhood improvements, good jobs, and support for social enterprise. They are gaining traction in the US and are starting in Ontario, so why not use this bill to incentivize municipalities to develop community benefits agreements as a criterion for major infrastructure projects?

The bill also requires apprentices to be hired for the construction or maintenance of infrastructure projects, but provides very little detail on what this will mean in practice. We understand that these details will be worked out in regulation; however, it will be critical to ensure that apprenticeship ratios are maintained. I look forward to hearing from the construction trades about this bill during the committee process and what they believe needs to be included in the regulations to ensure increased and more systematic use of apprentices on large infrastructure projects.

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Finally, perhaps the most worrisome provision of this bill is the regulatory authority it gives to the Minister of Infrastructure to establish regulations on virtually any infrastructure issue, including what infrastructure can be exempted from the definition of infrastructure. This kind of extremely broad latitude always raises concerns for Legislatures because passing such a bill is like writing a blank cheque: It's an open-ended invitation for the minister to introduce regulations on almost any aspect of infrastructure planning and funding.

Before I close, I want to comment on two other gaps I see in this legislation.

First, it doesn't require school boards and municipalities and other broader public sector entities to work together to make infrastructure planning decisions. What I experienced as a school board trustee was boards and municipalities often working in isolation instead of collaborating to maximize the impact of infrastructure investments in supporting the well-being of citizens and the needs of communities.

The other gap I see: Certainly, I think this bill is attempting to take a triple-bottom-line approach to infrastructure planning, but it is very weak as currently written. There's only one vague reference to environmental sustainability as a principle that should be considered, and there is basically no reference to social benefits other

than the hiring of apprentices and the principle that core services like health and education should continue to be delivered. I also believe that this is an aspect of the bill that could definitely be strengthened, and I hope we will be hearing about that when and if the bill moves to committee. Triple-bottom-line approaches ensure not only environmental protection, not only an economic boost, but also that people who are disadvantaged and marginalized from the labour market receive some of the benefits of infrastructure projects.

In closing, New Democrats do have some reservations about this bill. We are concerned about the lack of impact that we suspect it will have on ensuring evidence-based infrastructure planning from this government. However, we believe there is enough merit in the bill to support it through the second reading process, and we are very much looking forward to hearing from stakeholders at the committee about how this bill can be strengthened.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm very pleased to rise today to talk about Bill 6, to add my voice to this on the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act.

I do want to say that, as a newer member, I do listen very closely to what's being said, the discussion here. I find it somewhat disconcerting when the discussion tends to stray and, sadly, you hear things that have nothing to do with what's at hand. It would seem that the opposition sometimes uses their time to try to air their grievances, but I want to speak specifically to this bill.

In my riding of Kitchener Centre, which is an urban riding, we care very much about infrastructure. We're very encouraged by our government's investment in the LRT. Construction is now under way, with \$300 million dedicated to that.

We see construction of a new Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph—that is going to be beginning later this year—and we have ambitious plans for all-day, two-way GO service that's going to be coming to our community in the next decade. That is a very solid investment to position ourselves in the future.

The underlying principle of this bill, as you know, is building modern infrastructure. That is part of our plan to continue growing the economy and to create jobs. We are investing \$130 billion in public infrastructure, and that is over the next 10 years. These investments are going to add 110,000 jobs annually. We just heard the member for London West say that there is no social benefit. Well, I would say that creating 110,000 jobs is a very good social benefit.

If Bill 6 is passed, it would require our government and future governments to regularly prepare long-term infrastructure plans. I keep hearing this from my mayor in Kitchener: "We need to have not just a shot of money, but it needs to be ongoing." This is what we are committed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It's my pleasure to speak to this bill. As the member from Toronto—Danforth pointed out, it's unfortunate that we even need a bill like this because the government already has the power and the authority and I would say the responsibility to plan for infrastructure and investments.

However, the nature of government is such that all good planning and investment priorities are not done as they might be in the private sector, where profit would be the motivation, keeping costs under control would be a motivation and delivery of good services and good products would be the motivation. Sometimes other things happen, like, strangely, gas plants get closed—and that was not for profit; at least, maybe for political gain—and other activities like that that have interfered with investment planning as we want to do it now and in the future. We find ourselves now in a position where we can't afford subways because bad investment planning was done in the past, with gas plants and things of that nature.

Our member from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington articulated very clearly that what's wrong with this bill—which is a well-intentioned bill, unfortunately a necessary bill, because we have a government that's not doing what it should be doing: There's no accountability for compliance, no penalties, and therefore the bill will not be complied with. There are no penalties, no reason to comply with the unfortunate need to even write this bill.

We will support the bill because unfortunately government needs this kind of thing. We will have to put amendments into it in committee for accountability and oversight.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I sat very attentively and listened to the words of the member for London West. She touched on the lack of enforcements and consequences within this. This is another announcement which is going to bring concern in regard to bringing proper transparency, oversight and accountability on it. She was right when she highlighted that this was one of the first bills this government brought forward in their new mandate on July 7, 2014, and quite frankly, this is probably only the second or third time that they've talked about it. Traditionally, they have to do it six, seven, eight times before it moves forward. So it's still a long way from actually becoming policy.

In her comments she talked about the P3s and the amount of money that the Auditor General was able to identify that was lost in years of P3 development and projects. We're talking about \$8 billion, Mr. Speaker: \$8 billion. That's with a "b"—\$8 billion. That's a heck of a lot of money. That's money that we could be using today. If we had that money, would this government actually be considering selling off and privatizing Hydro One? I think not, because that's money that would be going toward our services and our programs.

One last comment that I wanted to make on behalf of the member: She talked about something in regard to

baking, some kind of a recipe, something going on. And you know what? I look at this bill—this is like a birthday cake, but the only people who are going to benefit from this cook are Bay Street individuals and large construction consortiums, which are not only going to benefit from blowing out the candles, but they're going to be eating their cake as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Barrie.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Just before I start to talk about the bill, the member from London West said that she didn't have much chance to talk about jobs and prosperity. I would like to suggest that there were four weeks when there was nothing talked about but the riding of Sudbury and there was lots of time then to talk about jobs and prosperity.

But moving on: If passed and proclaimed, this proposed legislation would build on this work by ensuring that current and future governments regularly prepare long-term infrastructure plans and continue to improve how this province prioritizes and addresses infrastructure needs. We need that. We need to know that it's not going to be left for years and years and years and hope that it doesn't break down. We need to have plans so that it doesn't cost as much money as it does because it has broken down.

The number one thing that the city of Barrie wants is money for infrastructure. I know that the rural communities, when I've been at rural events, definitely need roads and bridges improved. This will help them, and they're very happy about it.

In Barrie on Friday, we were there and our government announced that we will be having our GO train be more of a priority, and over five years we will have it all day, every day—that is very exciting—both ways. We believe that we'll be able to entice people to come and visit Barrie, not just have people from Barrie commuting in to work in Toronto.

I urge everyone to pass this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from London West has two minutes.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the member for Kitchener Centre, the member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills, the member for Algoma-Manitoulin and the member for Barrie for their comments on my remarks.

The member for Barrie talks about the importance of this legislation because it requires the government to regularly prepare and table infrastructure plans. We question why you need a law to enable the government to do that. Isn't that something the government could just go ahead and do? What this legislation includes is a list of feel-good, motherhood principles that it says the government should consider, but there is no requirement that these principles actually be reflected and incorporated into the long-term infrastructure plans that are brought forward. We have serious reservations about the lack of enforcement of this bill.

The member for Kitchener Centre talks about the social benefit of the jobs that are created, and that's one

of the issues about infrastructure investments. We know that jobs are created, but who is benefiting from those jobs? Are jobs being created for people who are long-term unemployed, who are disadvantaged, who have been marginalized from the labour market, who are living in poverty, who need opportunities to get a leg up in the labour market? There are no current provisions in this bill to ensure that there are some strong, targeted social benefits for individuals who have been shut out of Ontario's economy.

Speaker, as I said, we will be supporting this bill. We would love to see some evidence-based planning in infrastructure investments to prevent more P3s.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to introduce a number of my constituents who are here today with the Association for Reformed Political Action. In the gallery are Bert and Mariah Budding, James Van Gorp, Peter Bos and Jonathan Zekveld. Thank you all for coming. I look forward to having a meeting with them this afternoon.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Visiting Queen's Park today, in the east members' gallery, we have, from the Ontario Retirement Communities Association, Mr. Paul Fogolin, Charlotte Burchett and Lesley Chalklin. Welcome to Queen's Park. I hope you enjoy it.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I am happy to present Furakh Mir. She is the founder and president of Meningitis Relief Canada, and she's here today to educate us about meningitis. I hope you welcome her to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I ask all members to join me in welcoming Zack Goldford to the Legislature today. Zack is from the riding of Thornhill, the great riding of the honourable member from Thornhill, beside me. He is president of the Ontario PC Youth Association. Welcome back.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I have some guests here today from my riding. From the Wainfleet part of my riding, I have Ed, Jenn and Kim Vander Vegte, and Tyneesha Petter.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I am pleased to introduce representatives from both the Canadian Transplant Association and Trillium Gift of Life, who are here with us today, and to recognize that April is Be a Donor Month. We have with us Sandra Holdsworth, Marc Quinet, Suzanne Camu, Mike Sullivan, Helen Farinha, Mae Herrera, Linda Bowers, Kelly Kleinschmidt, Niva Segatto, Bianca Segatto, Ronnie Gavsie and Adam Lemm. I'll be joining them at the kickoff event for the Canadian Transplant Games, which are coming to Toronto in 2016. We're kicking it off at Nathan Phillips Square today.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I had the privilege to meet this morning with the National Assembly of Vietnam Law Committee, led by Dang Dinh Luyen. They're in the Speaker's gallery.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to welcome health care representatives from OPSEU that I had the pleasure of meeting with this morning: Jacqueline Partnoy, Kim Doucette, Julie Miller, Sandi Blancher and Richard Forget.

Also, I'm pleased to welcome Sara Labelle from Oshawa, who is the chair of the hospital professionals division, representing 24,000 hospital professions in 70 hospitals.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I would also like to welcome members of the Meningitis Relief Canada group, who are here today to mark World Meningitis Day, which takes place on April 24. I also invite all members to attend the reception they are hosting today, between 4 and 6 p.m., in committee room 228. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, it's déjà vu all over again, Speaker. I would also like to recognize and welcome people here from Meningitis Relief Canada, and invite members to the reception here today.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a long list of guests who have made the trip to Queen's Park to launch the campaign to restore sustainable hospital funding. I will read their names into the record, because they don't come to Queen's Park very often, and I'd like us to recognize them: Marlene Riviere, Paul Taylor, Jane Loucks, Sean Platt, Lisa Miller, Bryan Mitchell, Betty Palmieri, Jacqueline Partnoy, Kelly Poole, Yves Shank—from my riding—Harjinder Sangha, Sylvain Thibault, Remi Thibault, Una Wallace, Ed Zacharewski, Lynn Heins, Jonathan Hopkins, Richard Janson, Steph Kuntz, Kingsley Kwok, Sara Labelle—who was already introduced—Kelly Light, Lauren MacLaren, Linda Matteau, Steven McCaw, Patricia McNamara, Spencer McGonegal, Richard Meagher, Julie Miller, Brenda Allan, Jeff Arbus, Jan Archer, Adrian Balojin, Paul Beaumont, Sandi Blancher, Herve Cavanagh, Christine Charkavi, Mike Davison, Barb De Roche, Anette DiMatteo, Mike Donaldson and Kim Doucette.

Welcome to Queen's Park, and good luck with your campaign.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Two quick things: One, I want to introduce, on behalf of the MPP for Oak Ridges–Markham, page captain Megan Chan's father, Johnny Chan, who is visiting us in the public gallery. I want to welcome him to Queen's Park.

Also, Speaker, I just want to give a hearty happy birthday to my chief of staff, Jackie Choquette, for celebrating her birthday on Earth Day. Happy birthday to her.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I want to introduce Chris Yaccato, who is here from the Ontario Lung Association. He's here today to support Bill 45. More importantly, Speaker, he used to be your EA, so a special welcome to him.

Interjection: And my EA.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: And your EA.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Further introductions?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Bob should be in the front row.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let's get into question period before we start hearing that, okay? And then I'll tell you to stop.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today—and I'm sure we will provide a warm welcome to them—the delegation from the Law Committee of the National Assembly of Vietnam. Welcome.

WEARING OF CARNATIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Halton on a point of order.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent for members to wear carnations today in recognition of World Meningitis Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Halton is seeking unanimous consent to wear the carnations. Do we agree? Agreed.

They're in both lobbies. Thank you. Carnations are available in both lobbies.

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mr. Speaker, we ask that we stand down our lead questions, please.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The lead questions are to be stood down for the official opposition.

It is now time for the continuation.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order for—no, not a point of order. The member from Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, as well, we'll be standing down our leads, awaiting the Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We do require consent to stand down, so I'm going to seek unanimous—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, I have now heard that the lead is also requested to be stood down by the third party, so now our consent will be to stand down both leads.

Do we agree? Agreed.

I will now turn the rotation to—one moment, please.

I have been informed that the Deputy Premier will be responding to questions to the Premier today, so I will now request that the unanimous consent actually be rescinded.

Interjections: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let me be clear—*Interjections.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Let me clear about that. I mentioned this once before. It is considered a courtesy to notify. That has been the tradition. It does not make a requirement to attend.

I'm going to repeat myself that the indication is that the Deputy Premier will be made available to answer questions that were intended for the Premier.

I'm offering the opportunity to rescind the unanimous consent to stand down, providing the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the third party to put their lead questions.

I'm now going to turn to the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition for questions.

1040

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is to the Acting Premier, and I'm sure it will be an act.

Over the last few weeks, Deputy Premier, the official opposition has laid out five commitments that we are asking to be included in tomorrow's budget:

Cancel the Ontario registered pension plan payroll tax because it will kill jobs.

Cancel the pay-to-pollute carbon tax that will increase the price of everything in the province.

Fix the home care system and improve home care services while tying community care access centre funding to outcomes.

Commit to reducing electricity prices in the province.

Finally, we ask that you provide a serious, credible and detailed plan to balance the budget.

Deputy Premier, will you commit to these five requests in tomorrow's budget?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, really, the answer is a resounding no. We are absolutely committed to moving forward on retirement security for Ontarians, and I, for the life of me, don't understand why you would not support enhanced retirement security for seniors.

We are moving forward with a balanced plan. I know we're all looking forward to seeing the budget tomorrow, but we have a plan to get back to balance and, at the same time, invest in those much-needed infrastructure projects that will lift Ontario up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Deputy Premier, your own internal finance ministry documents have told you that the Ontario registered pension plan will cost the province at least 18,000 jobs. The pay-to-pollute carbon tax will spike the price of gas and increase the price of everything. Patients and their families are finding it extremely difficult accessing home care through the CCACs. Electricity prices are set to rise 15% on May 1, in addition to the 42% increase over five years that we already know about.

Let's be serious: No one believes you have a plan to balance the books by 2017-18. Rising interest payments on that debt means less money for important front-line

services like health care and education. The auditor, in her recent report, said exactly that.

Deputy Premier, will you take our advice and stop gouging Ontarians who can't afford to pay any more than they already are?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do respect the clarity of the party opposite, but we reject the approach that you are taking. We had an election less than a year ago. This different way of moving forward was debated. The people chose to go with the Liberal Party because we had a plan to move forward, investing in much-needed infrastructure, investing in the things that people need in our education system, in our health care system—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please finish.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, our plan is thoughtful, it is pragmatic and we are moving forward on implementing that plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: To the Deputy Premier: Ontarians know your budget will result in skyrocketing electricity prices and a tax on everything. Cuts to nursing and home care will continue. Some 249 nurses have been fired since last year's election, when the Premier promised health care services would be protected. Schools are closing and teachers are being fired despite the Premier's election promise that teachers wouldn't lose their jobs. Private sector jobs are being lost across most sectors of the province and of the economy because it has become too expensive to do business in Ontario, and the cost—

Hon. Brad Duguid: That's totally false. There is nothing to statistically support that whatsoever.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development, come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Stop the clock.

While he was in the middle of his argument, I asked the member to come to order. In case he didn't hear it, the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And whoever decides to want to be my armchair quarterback will also be warned.

Carry on.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Clearly, private sector jobs are being lost in many sectors of the economy. You can't deny that. You're living in wonderland if you deny—

Hon. Brad Duguid: Clearly, that's false.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development will come to order, and he's inches away from a warning.

Carry on.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Deputy Premier, why won't you commit to our budget ask that will give hard-working Ontarians financial relief, better home care and a credible plan to keep and create jobs in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we are all looking forward, as I said, to tomorrow's budget. What we will see is a plan to continue to promote the expansion of our economy in Ontario.

The member opposite, the member who ran on the platform of firing 100,000 people, is now concerned about job losses. Where was that concern in the last election campaign?

The member knows full well, as a former Minister of Health—he's watching carefully, I'm sure—that we have 24,000 more nurses working in Ontario than we did when we took office.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin-Caledon, come to order. The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: You can point to individual situations—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will repeat myself a second time for the member from Dufferin-Caledon and the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, and for the member from Simcoe North: Come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the heckling: 24,000 more nurses—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Not working.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Working. Working. Employed—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe North: second time.

Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me repeat: 24,000 more nurses are working in Ontario now than when you left office. I know the member opposite doesn't actually believe that number. We would be happy to give you those numbers. It is the truth, Speaker. They don't like it. They want us to cut nurses. We are not going to do that.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Deputy Premier. You grew our deficit from \$9.2 billion to \$10.5 billion, and now to \$10.9 billion this year. You're headed the wrong way. You're getting farther away from balancing, not closer.

You turned our once-proud province into an economic wreck. We have the highest energy costs in North America. We have the highest payroll taxes in Canada.

Since you turned us into a have-not province, you've received \$14 billion in equalization payments from the federal government, and you still can't balance the budget. You're failing our youth, hurting our seniors and putting families in an ever-deepening hole. Why should anyone believe you can balance a budget when you can't even reduce your own deficit?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We have a very clear plan to balance the budget by 2017-18, and tomorrow's budget will demonstrate how we are taking those next steps.

I can tell you that in 2014-15, our government is once again beating our deficit target, Speaker. We have done that year after year. The result is \$25 billion less in debt than originally projected.

We have a responsible plan. We have a balanced plan. We have a plan that invests in our people and invests in our infrastructure as we take responsible decisions to get best value for the money that we spend in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the deputy: Every expert has spoken out about the sorry state of Ontario's finances—all under your watch.

Our latest release of Focus on Finance puts Ontario under a microscope, and no one is happy with what it reveals. The Auditor General said, "Ontario's debt continues to grow faster than the province's economy." The result is what she calls a "crowding out of other spending." We now have less money for the things our citizens expect from the province. We're starting to see front-line cuts in health care and education, just as the Auditor General warned.

Later today, our interim leader, Jim Wilson, will present our opposition day motion with five budget asks designed to help Ontario's families. Will you agree to change your downward path and support our motion?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Just say yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oxford, come to order.

Deputy Premier.

1050

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the opposition party continues to tear Ontario down, calling us an economic wreck. That is simply not accurate.

Our plan, in stark contrast, is all about building Ontario up. We are committed to continuing to build that dynamic, innovative, competitive business environment. We will continue to invest in our people, particularly young entrepreneurs and young people who are working on that transition from school to work.

We absolutely are committed to building up our infrastructure. For too long, the appropriate investments have not been made in our infrastructure. We're addressing that.

And we are going to continue to ensure that the hard-working people of Ontario have the retirement security that they deserve. I would suggest that you look at our plan and join us in this fight.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the deputy: Earlier this week, we asked that you present a serious, credible and detailed

plan to balance the budget. Instead, we continue to see front-line cuts. Everyone in this Legislature has examples, so let me give you some from my hometown of North Bay: 94 full-time and 34 part-time front-line health care workers, including nurses, have been fired in North Bay; more than 54 people at Nipissing University, including 22 professors, have been fired in North Bay; and 43 workers from Ontario Northland have been fired in North Bay. Your wasteful and scandalous mismanagement of our budget is reducing services and putting the most vulnerable at risk.

When will you present a serious, credible and detailed plan to balance the budget?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The federal government has balanced theirs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, come to order. Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the member opposite has referred to health care in North Bay, because I know he already knows this information that I want to share with the rest of the Legislature. On Monday, it was announced that three health organizations would receive funding for this fiscal year. In fact, this announcement was made by the member opposite. Quoting the North Bay Nugget, "The funds, recently announced by Nipissing MPP Vic Fedeli, will go toward mental health and replacement reserve costs associated with supportive housing services in Nipissing."

In fact, the member opposite, in a release, extended—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: On Monday, he extended his "sincere appreciation on behalf of Nipissing residents to our local health care professionals for their"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Last year, the Premier stood in this House and she said she would "look at the assets" to "optimize the value of those assets."

The Premier has talked about maximization, unlocking value and rationalizing assets. The Premier has used just about every word except "sell" and "privatize" when it comes to Hydro One.

If the Liberals are so proud of what they're doing, so proud of selling and privatizing Hydro One, why can't they just say the words? Will this Deputy Premier tell Ontario today how proud the Liberals are to do what Mike Harris wouldn't dare do: sell and privatize Hydro One?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this government is committed to building the infrastructure that this province absolutely needs. Governments of the past have not invested appropriately in infrastructure, which leaves us with a huge infrastructure deficit. What we are doing is, we are unlocking the value of some of our assets so that we can build that very important transit infrastructure.

We were clear about this. This was discussed in the budget prior to the last election. It was included in our election platform. Whether the leader of the third party knows it or not, she ran on it too, because she took all of our fiscal assumptions and embedded them in her platform.

We're moving forward. We are expanding the sale of beer, and we're broadening the ownership of Hydro One. At the same time, we are protecting ratepayers. We are creating lasting public benefit to the people of this province, and the status quo just simply doesn't—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Liberals are selling Hydro One, and now they say this is what they ran on. The words "sell Hydro One" aren't in their platform; neither is "privatize." They were not even whispered on the campaign trail.

The Premier says she's being straightforward with Ontarians. Oh, please. Ontarians were never told of her plan to sell Hydro One, Ontarians were never asked what they think of her plan to sell Hydro One and they certainly have never signed off on the Liberal plan, the wrong-headed plan the Liberals have, to sell Hydro One.

Will the Liberals just come out and admit it—just admit it—to the people of Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The party opposite has been vocal in their criticism, but they have offered no constructive plans on how to pay for infrastructure that we need in this province. This is not about ideology. This is about finding a practical solution to a problem.

Some members of the NDP, I know, do support this. Former NDP cabinet minister Frances Lankin was on the panel. She understands that we need to make these investments. The Power Workers' Union is supportive of our plan. They understand that need. LIUNA, the building trades, mayors and councillors across this province are supportive of this plan. It is unfortunate that the leader of the third party can't see beyond—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Once the Liberals sell off Hydro One, it is gone. There is no going back. As Ontarians watch rates go up to feed Bay Street profits, they will do so knowing that they will never, ever be able to regain control of their hydro system. It is wrong for our

generation, it is wrong for our kids' generation and it is wrong for our grandkids' generation.

The Premier is spending more time right now in this province consulting about where to sell a 12-pack of Bud than they are about privatizing strategic assets like Hydro One. Selling Hydro One is forever. The plan is the wrong plan for Ontario.

Will the Liberals do the right thing and pull the plug on this plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As a result of that decision to broaden the ownership of Hydro One while protecting the public interest, it is allowing us to invest in infrastructure. The Moving Ontario Forward fund is now \$31.5 billion over 10 years because we've been able to unlock those assets. Some \$16 billion of that will be spent in the GTHA and \$15 billion outside the GTHA. It will go for regional express rail, Hamilton RT, Hurontario LRT—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Someone is close to a warning.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's allowing us to fund the Connecting Links program, Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph. I ask the member opposite: What do you want to cut? What don't you want to build?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

New question: leader of the third party.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Deputy Premier. The Premier's plan is wrong for Ontarians. It is going to mean that families who are already stretched are going to be stretched even further. People will be paying more so that a small handful of shareholders can make more money. Every dollar that goes into their pockets is a dollar that doesn't go into hospitals, schools or transit. This will actually cut stable income that goes into projects like building transit, keeping schools open or building hospitals.

Do the Liberals really think Ontarians should keep paying more and more and more and getting less and less and less?

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Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, we just fundamentally disagree with the approach of the third party. We believe in investing in our infrastructure. We believe in investing in those projects that actually improve the quality of life for the people of this province. I think that if she went and spoke to the people in Hamilton, they would say that they don't want to spend time caught in gridlock.

We must make these investments. We want a growing, thriving economy because it's the right thing to do for people. So we are going to move forward. We are moving forward, building the infrastructure that is needed, because the people of this province are demanding that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Today, Hydro One puts hundreds of millions of dollars into the things that people rely on, like hospitals, schools and infrastructure. But the Liberals are planning to sell Hydro One to Bay Street, and it's going to make a handful of well-connected Bay Street investors even wealthier while Ontarians have to stretch every dollar further just to make ends meet.

Privatizing Hydro One is wrong for Ontarians and will actually cut stable, long-term revenue. Why do the Liberals think this is okay?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, the member knows that part of the work of the panel was to actually look at how you offset the revenue loss. They did that. That's why we're making changes in beer distribution, for example. But we're not the only ones who think this is a great idea. Don MacKinnon the president of the Power Workers' Union, says, "The Power Workers' Union welcomes and supports the decision by government to keep Hydro One whole in an IPO process that would, in partnership with government, broaden the ownership structure in Hydro One. This will position the company to grow and provide further high-skill quality jobs for Ontarians."

Joe Mancinelli, the vice-president at LIUNA International, says, "The Wynne government is to be commended for today's announcement implementing sweeping changes in our province which will greatly benefit all Ontarians. The \$4 billion these changes will introduce for investment in infrastructure projects"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier wants to continue to protect private profits through sweetheart P3 deals. That's going to waste billions and hurt families. She's opening up brand new HST loopholes. That's going to waste billions and hurt families. She's planning to sell Hydro One to Bay Street. It means a cut to provincial revenues and it's going to hurt families.

Nobody cares what the Premier calls this, whether she calls it ideological, non-ideological, the activist centre; I call it a sellout. I call it taking hard-earned dollars from middle-class families and struggling Ontarians and dumping those dollars into the pockets of Bay Street boardrooms and shareholders. That's what this is. It doesn't matter what she calls it, because those are the facts. The money is coming out of the pockets of everyday families and going into the pockets of Bay Street shareholders. That plan is wrong for Ontario, and Ontarians deserve better.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's hear what Joe Mancinelli had to say. He said, "The \$4 billion these changes will introduce for investment in infrastructure projects, the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history, is welcome news to LIUNA and our members. Job creation is one of the key components of this initiative, and we welcome the much-needed infrastructure and the thousands of jobs that will be created for our members for years to come."

There are many others who are supporting this decision. We've heard the NDP do not support these investments. I think that's a shame, because the people of this province need those investments.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy. I'll go directly to him because I know it's going to get dumped over there anyway.

Minister, the speed at which the price of electricity continues to escalate in Ontario under your government is even quicker than your attempt to expedite the sale of Hydro One. Your frantic desire to sell off this public asset clearly suggests and indicates that your government is desperate for money. Perhaps if you weren't recklessly wasting billions of dollars on failed gas plants, expensive wind energy experiments and defective smart meters, energy rates would be much more affordable and you wouldn't have to resort to the sale of Hydro One.

Minister, why are you continuing to do nothing to lower unaffordable energy rates for ratepayers and businesses here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I'm pleased that the member mentioned electricity rates for businesses across the province. One word that the opposition never mentions is "conservation." Let me say a few words about conservation.

Home Depot has completed 191 conservation projects province-wide. These have reduced energy consumption by more than 29 million kilowatt hours since 2012, enough electricity to power more than 3,000 typical Ontario homes per year.

Tim Hortons, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Leader of the Opposition will come to order, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And Thornhill.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Did I miss? Never mind. Thank you.

Finish, please.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, 245 Tim Hortons restaurants underwent renovations that included energy-saving measures like switching to LED lighting and installing white roofs. Through its combined conservation efforts last year, Tim Hortons would save around four million kilowatt hours of electricity province-wide—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, Minister, when the factory closes, their consumption goes down to zero. I guess that's your ultimate conservation plan.

Minister, you have got to stop playing games with vulnerable people in Ontario, with your energy prices. One day you announce a minuscule rebate for low-income

ratepayers. However, within days, you increase their bills and the bills of everyone else across this province by an unacceptable, unsustainable 15%.

This sleight-of-hand shell game of yours has got to stop. People cannot take it anymore. They've had enough of your failed energy experiments here in the province of Ontario. Your negligence has resulted in unaffordable electricity rates, making it more and more difficult for small business, seniors and families to survive in this great province of Ontario.

Minister, as one of our PC caucus asked, will you restore competitive electricity rates in Ontario, to make them affordable for families, seniors and small businesses?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the member is aware of the fact that the MDF paperboard plant in Pembroke, his riding, is reopening after being accepted into the IEI Program—which is a program that supports businesses—creating 140 new jobs for the area, in his riding.

Atlantic Packaging, from Whitby, is expanding their paper mill and creating 80 jobs with the help of the new IEI Program. Detour Gold says that the program will save them \$20 million in one year while they expand what will be one of the largest gold mines in Canada.

Our rates are competitive. On the residential side, there are three provinces that have higher rates than we do. There are two, Manitoba and Quebec, that are considerably lower because of legacy hydro programs. When we compare them to cities like Detroit, Boston and New York, we're considerably below them. In North America, we are competitive from an industrial business point of view, and competitive from a residential—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Stop the clock, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, contrary to Liberal spin, Ontarians know that your government sets the priorities for education in this province.

This Liberal government has made it clear that it prioritizes cutting special education and forced closures of neighbourhood schools. Now we're learning that they plan on flip-flopping on their commitment to keep class sizes manageable.

Speaker, why is this government refusing to take responsibility for short-sighted cuts to education, which have resulted in labour unrest and the closure of community schools?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm really pleased to share with this Legislature that, in fact, education funding is stable. It was \$22.5 billion last year; it's \$22.5 billion this year—and the number of students has gone down, which means the per-pupil amount has gone up.

1110

But let me tell you about some of the really exciting things that we're doing. We have invested \$12.9 billion in school infrastructure, including nearly 725 new schools and more than 700 additions and renovations. We've worked to give our students programs like specialist high-skills majors, co-op education and dual credits. We announced just last week that the graduation rate has now gone up to 84%. We are actually doubling the amount of money this year spent on school renovation—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to point out to the Minister of Education: You say funding is stable. Special education needs have gone up, hydro rates have gone up, and transportation costs have gone up; therefore, the funding has gone down.

Speaker, back to the Minister of Education: Ontario families are growing tired of a minister who finds her portfolio perplexing. With teachers in Durham on strike, Rainbow District in northern Ontario to join next week, and now Peel preparing to strike in May, this government must take responsibility for throwing our school system into chaos.

Why are the minister and her government skirting responsibility for the mess her government's cuts to education have made in our school system?

Hon. Liz Sandals: The member opposite might be interested to know that the lines to pay for utilities have gone up.

However, let's talk about Durham, because the member opposite brought up Durham. Let me tell you about Durham. The Durham public board is going to receive \$729 million in funding for this school year. That's \$2 million more than last year. It's \$289 million more than in 2003. In fact, it has gone up 65% since 2002-03. Let me tell you about the per pupil funding. It's up almost \$4,000 in Durham, a 57.4% increase for every single student in Durham. It's now \$10,661—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

New question.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Have you been ejected?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, you may be. Carry on.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970. Since then, Earth Day has grown into an international event, with 192 countries holding Earth Day events across the globe. Children in classrooms and daycares in Barrie and around the world will be learning about why there is an Earth Day and how they can help save our planet on a daily basis. Earth Day Canada is celebrating their 25th anniversary this year with the goal to engage people across the country in a national effort to reduce their carbon footprint.

I'm sure constituents of my riding of Barrie will be pleased to know that, thanks to the leadership of this government, Ontario met—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Speaker, could you please ask the minister to answer: What are some simple things Ontarians can do to reduce their carbon footprint?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member from Barrie, who is a great educator and understands the importance of the next generation.

I was out with about 100 children this morning. There are certain moments in your life you'll never forget, and this was one of them. I realized, as I was looking at those children, that they are the first generation that will never know normal climate. We are the last generation that will ever know normal climate. What they were saying to me and what they wanted to say to members of the Legislature is that they ride their bikes; that they're living on a planet that's fast heading for four degrees Celsius, and they want us to stop that. They realize that we're the last generation that can do that.

This is the 25th Earth Day anniversary in Canada; we maybe have 25 more Earth Days to get this right. I'm very proud to be part of a government that understands that that's the first priority of Canadians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister. While it's important that individuals reflect on their carbon footprint and take some simple measures to reduce their impact on the environment, it's equally important that our government continue to show leadership in fighting climate change. I know that my constituents are proud of the fact that Ontario was the first jurisdiction in North America to close coal-fired power plants.

The 2013 Air Quality in Ontario report was released a week ago, on the anniversary of the last coal plant closure in Ontario. The report confirms that our air quality has improved significantly over the last 10 years, and for the first time in 20 years, no—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please finish. Wrap up.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Minister, could you inform us about what further action this government is taking to fight climate change and reduce greenhouse gas pollution in our atmosphere?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton will come to order. The member from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek: I can do without the whistling.

Mr. Paul Miller: I didn't do it. I didn't whistle.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sorry. Whoever it was, I'll do without it. I apologize.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Eglinton—Lawrence. I have a feeling that you have not got the message that I would like a question period as best we can.

Minister?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that.

We are doing everything from my friend the Minister of Transportation working to electrify the entire GO system—in economic and development we're global leaders in green technology, low-carbon technology. These are very important things.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Did you drive together with the Premier, Steven?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, come to order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It was interesting because my friend from Timmins—James Bay made the reference to dinosaurs, which I thought were extinct until I heard some of the positions of the party opposite. The difference between us and dinosaurs—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, I demand retraction. To refer to honourable members as dinosaurs is unacceptable.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I make my comment that I was going to make, the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell is warned.

I am not impressed with any kind of response that impugns anyone in this place. It's getting a little ridiculous, so let's just calm down, everyone.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Will he withdraw that?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I wouldn't want to add anything more to where you are right now.

And I would advise anyone that if they do say something that is inflammatory, that they would be kind enough to withdraw.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I sometimes don't think we fully understand how serious this was. Yesterday, the federal government became the first government to completely divest entirely from any dollars or expenditures in climate change, leaving the entire fight on climate change in this country to municipalities and provinces. So here we are in the shadow of the worst environmental budget in Canadian history, celebrating Earth Day.

HOME CARE

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Let me remind you that there are approximately 350,000 people over the age of 65 who currently receive home care services in Ontario. They have told us over and over again that their home care system is broken; it is inadequate and inconsistent at best. With our aging population and your fiscal mismanagement, nobody believes the system will be equipped to handle future need. Quality and accessibility will continue to deteriorate. Your expert, Gail Donner, has said, "Everyone ... is frustrated with a system that fails to meet the needs of clients and families.... no one thinks the status quo is an option."

Deputy Premier, how much longer do seniors and their families have to wait for you to make the necessary changes to their home care system?

1120

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. I know the member opposite knows that we appointed Gail Donner and a team of experts, in fact, to look at home and community care. We did that last year. They presented their report to me at the end of January. That report is being made public.

I've also indicated that I've endorsed the recommendations in that report. We agree that more needs to be done for home and community care. That's the express purpose of us convening that table in the first place.

We are taking the recommendations very seriously. We are continuing to invest in home and community care. Of course, this year \$270 million more invested in home and community care—that's a 5% increase. But we are looking at the table's—the expert panel's—recommendations very seriously, and we will be making changes based on those recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Deputy Premier. The people of Ontario are frustrated. This frustration is being felt by the senior citizen who can't get a personal support worker following a hip replacement. This frustration is felt by a daughter trying to get physiotherapy for her father who recently suffered a stroke. This frustration is being felt by the thousands of people who cannot get the home care services they need.

We know the two biggest issues within our system are excessive bureaucracy and a lack of accountability for system outcomes, yet you continue to ignore the obvious.

Deputy Premier, will you make the functional changes to our system that we need in order to improve patient care? Will you tie funding to the community care access centres so we can have improved outcomes and patient results? Will you do that, Deputy Premier?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As I said, we're making substantial investments in our home and community care sector—more than \$4 billion invested in that sector annually, increasing that this year, next year and the year after by 5%, as we continue to provide that high-quality care, accessible and timely care, in the places where people want it the most: in their homes or in their communities. We are making changes.

I would hope, now that we have Gail Donner's report guiding the way forward with her specific recommendations of her and of the team—I would like to ask the member opposite if we can count on his support as we implement those changes that are required to meet the recommendations and the aspirations that are outlined in that report.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est également pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. OPSEU hospital workers are at Queen's Park today in the gallery. They came to tell us, as first-hand witnesses, that the Liberal government's cuts to health care are having a devastating impact on quality of care.

I'll give you some examples. At Lakeridge Health centre, they had to let 20% of their genetic technologists go. They are also laying off their senior technologists in flow cytometry. This is the charge tech being laid off. These positions have a direct impact on the patients at the Durham regional cancer centre.

In Cornwall, it is 11% of their sonographers that have been cut.

Hospitals are forced to reduce or cut these services because of your government cuts. My question is simple: How many more cuts should we expect—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Children and Youth Services, come to order, a second time.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —Ontario's hospitals will see in tomorrow's budget?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'll say this as generously as I can, but, despite what the member opposite has just said, the facts are somewhat different. We are, and have been and will be, increasing our funding to health care, as we have done over the past decade, and we will continue to do so moving forward.

The member opposite knows that we invest more than \$50 billion in our health care system annually, and that investment—a significant portion of that investment goes into the hospital environment as well. That investment in our hospitals—our front-line health care workers and the environment that people depend on when they do get ill and require service—has increased by more than 50% in the last decade.

It is factually incorrect, I would suggest to the member opposite. To state that we are somehow cutting health care—health care has for the past decade increased in funding each year, and it will continue to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is bad enough that we're seeing health care cuts throughout our province, but when the minister refuses to acknowledge that those cuts are taking place, it's making things worse, not better.

This is year three of a hospital-based budget freeze. All of them are struggling to balance their budgets, and they have no choice but to cut programs, services and positions. The bottom line looks like this: 22 positions cut in Cambridge; in London, 97 positions cut; Samia, 39 positions cut; Timmins, 40 positions cut; Sudbury, 42 positions cut; CHEO, 50 positions cut; and at the brand new hospital in North Bay, 94 full-time and 34 part-time positions cut. We all know who pays the price for those cuts: It's the patients who need health care services.

Speaker, with the budget coming tomorrow, will Ontarians continue to see this right-wing austerity health care agenda? How many more cuts to health care can we expect to see in tomorrow's budget?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite, of course, has her list and I have mine, which is somewhat different.

The Ottawa Hospital has 49 RN active postings right now where they're looking for 49 registered nurses to work at that hospital; the Royal Ottawa health centre, 15 RNs and one RPN active postings today; the Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital is looking for 10 RNs; London Health Sciences Centre is looking for 10 RNs and three nurse practitioners; Lakeridge Health centre, where I had the privilege of announcing a new pharmacy, is looking for seven RNs; Hamilton Health Sciences centre is looking for 16 RNs; Grand River, seven RNs; Bluewater Health system, five RPNs; Almonte General Hospital, two RNs and four RPNs. This is the situation around the province.

Of course, programs change, and there are changes that are made at that local level, as they should be, but we are adding health care personnel—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

FLOODING

Mr. Chris Ballard: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Rising temperatures and April showers bring spring flowers, but rising temperatures and heavy rains also bring spring flooding.

The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, along with conservation authorities like the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, monitors surface water levels, weather forecasts, water conditions and locations across our watershed. These measurements, weather forecasts and radar information on temperature and rainfall predictions, along with historical data, are all compiled to develop a flood forecast.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry: Can the minister please explain to the House what his ministry is doing to ensure that communities in Ontario are prepared to respond to potential flooding emergencies?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. It's topical and timely.

Our ministry works with communities, conservation authorities and Environment Canada to forecast where and when flooding is likely to occur. The ministry has an information website to inform people in Ontario about potential flooding, provide real-time information about weather and flooding risks, and tips on what to do in the event of flooding.

This piece is very important: Conservation authorities, for people to know on a local level, are responsible for providing local flood messaging to municipalities. In areas where there is not a conservation authority, district offices will provide that information to First Nations communities and to the local municipalities where a conservation authority does not exist.

Our Surface Water Monitoring Centre performs daily assessment for flood hazard potential. The ministry does a variety of things in that regard, and monitors watershed conditions 24 hours a day. This is a significant piece, and I want to make sure that communities, conservation authorities and First Nations are aware of what's available to them in terms of achieving that data.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you to the minister for his response and dedication to ensuring that Ontario's communities are as prepared as possible for potential floods.

Water levels remain high in parts of Ontario, as is common for this time of year, and we expect high-water conditions to continue for several weeks.

In northern Ontario, a late spring snow melt, accompanied by above-average snow pack and significant rainfall, can lead to flooding. As we know, these floods can shut down roads, flood homes and, in extreme circumstances, lead to evacuations. Residents from all parts of Ontario need to know that, in the event of an emergency such as a flood, our province has proper response plans in place.

Through you, Mr. Speaker: Can the minister please tell the House how our government prepares to respond to emergencies such as floods in our province?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thanks to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for asking a very important question.

Each spring, many communities across Ontario are confronted with the possibility of flooding as winter snow melts and river ice breaks up. Just last night, the member from Prince Edward–Hastings and I were reminiscing about visiting Belleville last year when they were fighting the floods in their community.

1130

Our most important priority is the safety and security of all Ontarians, and that means, well before we begin to

enjoy warmer weather, that the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management, also known as OFMEM, prepares host communities to accept evacuees. This ensures that during a flood, people in affected communities have a safe place to go.

Throughout the flood season, OFMEM maintains regular contact with municipalities and ministries to assess the risk from flooding and ensure that we have the most up-to-date information. If an evacuation is necessary, OFMEM works closely with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to coordinate flights out of affected communities.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Last week you released your new carbon pay-to-pollute scheme, and your own Premier admitted herself that she was adding a tax. We know that this is because the price of everything will increase. What we don't know are the details on it. Instead, you have left Ontarians in the dark about how much you will be taking out of their wallets.

Deputy Premier, families can't afford to manage their budgets the way you do. They can't run deficits for 11 years and shrug off hundreds of billions of dollars of debt.

Deputy Premier, will you commit to not implementing another devastating tax onto the people of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I actually have a question for the member opposite.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Stop the clock. Thank you.

Please finish.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I think she might be helpful in helping me understand something. When her party introduced a cap-and-trade on NO_x and SO_x, they didn't call it a tax on everything. When they did it again on carbon monoxide, they didn't call it a tax on everything. When the Alberta government—their sister party in Alberta—did it, they didn't call it a tax on everything. Why is that? Because it's not a tax on everything. It's an effective carbon trading market.

But given their party's lack of concern—and their federal cousins', with zero investment in climate change, who took us out of Kyoto and are undermining efforts right now to get an international agreement in Paris—I would be pretty embarrassed if I was a card-carrying Conservative today too.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Speaker, I have to go back to the Deputy Premier. The bottom line is that when costs go up for business, the cost of living goes up for everyone. Ontarians cannot afford another tax that will go to fund the scandal-plagued, mismanaged Liberal govern-

ment. Liberal mismanagement in this province has already seriously affected the lives of all Ontarians.

In my riding alone, we have a hospital in disarray from broken Liberal promises. We have seniors who can't afford diabetic test strips, and families who cannot afford their hydro bill. And here you are: You're wanting to add another tax on them. This will be devastating to the people across the province. They can't afford your arrogance any longer.

Deputy Premier, as the fourth of our five budget asks, will you commit, in your 2015 budget, not to levy another misguided tax on the people of Ontario?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, let me share with the member what I think Ontarians can't afford. The residents of Goderich, in her constituency, can't afford another devastating tornado. They can't afford it.

The people in Burlington cannot afford to see their operating rooms wiped out by 100-year floods, two in 24 months—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton is warned. Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Apple farmers in rural Ontario can't afford to lose 80% of their crop anymore. People who get their drinking water from Lake Ontario can't afford to risk it going toxic so they can't even boil it. Ontarians can't afford more frequent ice storms. People who ride GO Transit can't afford \$600 million of damage in one hour, Mr. Speaker. We can't afford—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Today is Earth Day. It's a day to think about the environment, to think about sustainability and conservation. However, this government has had a problem sustaining its energy conservation programs.

In 2010, the government cut the Ontario Home Energy Savings Program, which helped people reduce their heating bill with grants to retrofit their homes and make them more energy-efficient. Since then, energy costs have skyrocketed. Why did this government cancel this important home energy conservation program?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The member would know that in our long-term energy plan of December 2013, "conservation first" is the overriding principle of that plan, Mr. Speaker. He will also know that throughout November and December of this past year, every LDC, every utility across the province, signed on to a new conservation framework. It is a very extensive program. It gives more authority to the LDCs to initiate conservation that is relevant to their particular communities.

We are conservation first. We're going to continue on that, and our projections are that there will be very, very extensive take-up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, Speaker, this is a government that loves to make announcements—loves it. But it's the follow-through that counts.

Seven years ago, the government announced an agreement with Quebec to create a cap-and-trade system by January 2010. The NDP welcomed the announcement. But seven years later, we're still waiting—and Speaker, I was there for the reannouncement, if that's their answer.

In 2013, the government announced a plan to help homeowners conserve energy with on-bill financing for energy retrofits. It's now 2015, and there is still no such program.

Mr. Speaker, will Ontarians have to wait another seven years for action on energy conservation, just as we have had to wait seven years on cap-and-trade?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Well, if you were listening to the question from your friends next door, you will know you wouldn't have to wait very long for a carbon market.

Second of all, we are doing unprecedented things right now, Mr. Speaker, in building standards and building codes. Thank you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and his predecessors for initiating standards that are actually bringing down greenhouse gases and emissions. We're just beginning, because, working with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Minister of Economic Development and the Minister of Energy, we are about to introduce some of the most robust initiatives in reducing building-based greenhouse gas emissions, providing Ontarians with lower costs of heating their homes.

I'm working closely with the Minister of Transportation, who is doing globe-leading work right now in the electrification of transit. We are making the biggest investments in public transit in the history of Ontario and some of the biggest in the history of North America. You don't have to wait for a bus very long anymore, Mr. Speaker, thanks to this government.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is for the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. I think we can all agree that the spring weather that we're finally having and enjoying presents a welcome relief following the great winter that has just passed.

As my constituents of Beaches—East York are quick to remind me, with spring comes a whole host of new responsibilities for homeowners. Yard maintenance, lawn care, seasonal cleaning and other landscaping needs are all tasks that many homeowners are taking up with the use of service providers. Seasonal yard work is important, and it creates valuable opportunities for entrepreneurs and Ontario businesses. With the short-term and the sometimes informal nature of these services, however, many of us are concerned and worried about the legitimacy of the agreements that are entered into with the service providers.

Will the Minister of Government and Consumer Services address the concern and speak to how his ministry regulates home service contracts?

Hon. David Orazietti: I want to thank the member from Beaches–East York for raising this important consumer protection issue. I agree that this type of seasonal work creates excellent employment opportunities.

We also realize that, with the rush to receive these services, consumers are vulnerable to entering into agreements with ambiguous or confusing terms, sometimes dictated over the phone. Agreements should be completed in person, and consumers should request a written estimate for the services they receive. I strongly encourage all consumers not to commit to payments from a random sales call. If a company presents a good deal, consider the terms thoroughly and know that you're entitled to a written contract. Terms and conditions surrounding continuous services should be carefully reviewed.

Providing clear, contractual agreements for consumers is a priority, and our government continues to strengthen these services for our consumers.

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted by the response the minister has given us about this very important area of concern for Ontario consumers.

We agree, and I agree, that lawn care companies make unique and important contributions to our seasonal economy. It's how I got through university. Most Ontarians have either used such a company, worked for one or they know somebody who had relied on their services in the past. It's important that we instill confidence in Ontarians that their government is contributing to a fair and competitive marketplace.

I know the Ministry of Government and Consumers Services has a strong history of enforcing fair consumer standards for Ontarians. I tell my concerned constituents in Beaches–East York that when they file complaints, they will receive decisive actions that will be taken up on their behalf. It's very important that we protect consumers at every stage of these relationships.

Can the Minister of Government and Consumer Services please speak to action the ministry has taken to protect consumers specifically in dealing with lawn care companies?

Hon. David Orazietti: Again to the member from Beaches–East York, thank you for the question. Our ministry continues to monitor this issue closely and has taken action when necessary. In 2014, we received 124 complaints with regard to this particular issue. We've demanded that companies are practising good and safe consumer practices with respect to providing written contracts for consumers. We've insisted that they cease to renew contracts if they don't have the consent of the consumer. I'm pleased with our track record in this area. We're happy to act on these issues when they're brought to our attention in the ministry.

I would say that with respect to these particular contracts, you should be, if you're charged improperly for

any type of service, immediately contacting the business, writing a letter and following up with them. If they refuse to act on that, contact the ministry and we'll be pleased to follow up and respond on behalf of the consumer.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Deputy Premier. You've said that a mandatory Ontario pension plan would be good for the province, yet your own ministry has a document which supports the notion that 54,000 people will lose their jobs. That's not the only—people will have reduced or eliminated their own existing pension plans.

On behalf of Ontarians, the PC caucus has identified five key commitments we need to see from your budget or your government in order to support your budget. This is one, Premier, will you commit, in your 2015 budget, to saving jobs and abandoning the Ontario pension plan?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

I want to remind some members that there's a W behind their names.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member opposite for this question. The implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is actually all about Ontario's future economy. We know that if people retire without adequate income in retirement, that has the potential to slow down consumption. If we have consumption that is slowed down, that could potentially slow down investments that are made in business, and that could hurt Ontario's economy.

Our plan, which is to implement the ORPP for January 2017, is all about growing Ontario's economy, because people will have an adequate income for life that they will spend into their retirement. That's good for business, that's good for Ontario's economy and that's certainly good for our future retirees. When it comes to being mindful of the impact on business, we're taking that into consideration as well.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order from the member from Davenport.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I would like to welcome members and staff of the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre's civic engagement group to Queen's Park today. They were in attendance here at question period and will be touring the Legislative Assembly to learn about how government works. Welcome to that group.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Newmarket–Aurora, point of order.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Mr. Speaker, it's not a point of order. I would like to welcome students from Light of Christ Catholic Elementary School in Newmarket–Aurora.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Actually, the member is absolutely correct. It is not a point of order to introduce, but I give a little leeway there.

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on the motion for allocation of time on Bill 80, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animals for Research Act with respect to the possession and breeding of orcas and administrative requirements for animal care.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1145 to 1150.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On April 21, Mr. Bradley moved government notice of motion number 20. All those in favour of the motion please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Anderson, Granville
Baker, Yvan
Balkissoon, Bas
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bradley, James J.
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fraser, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoggarth, Michael
Hoskins, Eric
Hunter, Mitzie
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Sophie
Kwinter, Monte
MacCharles, Tracy
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted

Meilleur, Madeleine
Milczyn, Peter Z.
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Thibault, Glenn
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Bisson, Gilles
Clark, Steve
Fife, Catherine
Forster, Cindy
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne
Gélinas, France
Gretzky, Lisa
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael

Hatfield, Percy
Hillier, Randy
Horwath, Andrea
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
Mantha, Michael
Martow, Gila
McDonnell, Jim
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul
Munro, Julia

Nicholls, Rick
Pettapiece, Randy
Sattler, Peggy
Scott, Laurie
Singh, Jagmeet
Smith, Todd
Tabuns, Peter
Thompson, Lisa M.
Vanthof, John
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakubski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 51; the nays are 39.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1154 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I ask everyone in the House to join me in welcoming the president and founder of Meningitis Relief Canada, Furakh Mir, who is in the gallery today, as well as Sarabjit Kaur.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, with your indulgence, I have several guests in the east members' gallery that I'd like to introduce today: Anna Baggio, CPAWS Wildlands League; Roger Barber, Resolute Forest Products; Dana Collins, Canadian Institute of Forestry; Erik Holmstrom, from Weyerhaeuser; Dale Kaemingh, Manitou Forest Products; Rick—I practised this one, too—Ksiezopolski, Norbord; Sylvain Levesque, Georgia-Pacific; Jamie Lim and Christine Leduc, Ontario Forest Industries Association; Jamie McRae, McRae Lumber; Brian Nicks, EACOM Timber Corp.; Michael O'Brien, AV Terrace Bay; Ailbe Prendiville, Kenora Forest Products; Fred Pinto, from the Ontario Professional Foresters Association; Dana Shaw, from Shaw Lumber; Norm Stephenson, from Columbia Forest Products; and Al Thorne, from Tembec. I welcome them all to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is my pleasure to welcome to Queen's Park today Carmen Santoro, president of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association. He is joined by our Oshawa Professional Firefighters Association Local 465 president, Steve Barkwell. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. Further introductions? It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BILL BLAIR

Mr. Jim Wilson: Today I rise to mark the retirement of Toronto police chief Bill Blair. Chief Blair's term officially ends on April 26, 10 years from the date he was appointed. His tenure over the last decade has been significant and important, as he juggled the many challenges involved in running the largest police force in the country. He's a cop's cop, having worked alongside the members of his force for more than 30 years, coming up through the ranks to the position of top cop.

Prior to his days as chief, Bill Blair worked in many different areas of the Toronto Police Service. Starting as a beat officer in downtown Toronto—a somewhat differ-

ent downtown in those days, I suspect, than we see today—his career saw him involved in some of the most challenging areas of policing. Drug enforcement, organized crime and major criminal investigations were all areas of the force that Chief Blair spent time in, broadening his experience.

Among the many achievements he has had as chief, the development and implementation of the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy stands out as an innovative way to go about combatting violent crime.

As chief, he has spent the last 10 years working with members of his force, various levels of government and the city as a whole—a valued member of the Toronto community through his involvement in a variety of organizations such as Covenant House and the United Way.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that Chief Blair and I share the same alma mater, the University of Toronto. While I'm pretty sure we weren't there at quite the same time and we didn't major in the same courses—he having completed his degree in economics and criminology—I'm pleased to say that we are both graduates of that wonderful place across the street, and to announce that Chief Blair hasn't really left, as he's now going to lecture at the University of Toronto.

As his time as Toronto chief of police draws to a close, I'm proud to stand in this House and join members of the PC caucus—and, I'm sure, all members of the House—and ask my fellow members to congratulate Chief Blair for a job very well done.

WORLD MENINGITIS DAY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Again, as I introduced Furakh Mir, founder and president of Meningitis Relief Canada, I also want to raise my voice on this issue. During the last session, I introduced a bill recognizing April 24 of every year as World Meningitis Day in this province. I'm happy to see that this bill is being reintroduced, and it has the full support of the New Democrats.

Meningitis Relief Canada has done some incredible work in raising awareness around this very troubling and dangerous disease. It has worked towards educating people around the symptoms and dangers of meningitis. It's a charity. It provides counselling and support for people and families who are dealing with meningitis.

It also has the important mandate of raising awareness of this disease, which does not have enough awareness. Meningitis is something that can appear quite suddenly. Because it looks like the flu, it's very hard to detect, and often the crucial detection in the early hours is very important in order to treat this disease. Tragically, it can be fatal in one or two days.

About 1,000 people die from meningitis every year. Public awareness is key. It's so important that we're better informed, better aware, of the dangers of meningitis, and that's why recognizing April 24 as World Meningitis Day is so important. By proclaiming this day, we can ensure that there's a platform to ensure that there's further education and awareness around the symp-

toms and what can be done to address this very dangerous disease. We can ensure that no one else has to lose a loved one to this very serious and tragic disease.

Again, it's my hope to see this bill passed and April 24 will be recognized as World Meningitis Day in Ontario.

NATIONAL ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION AWARENESS WEEK

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize this week as National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week. Tonight I'm looking forward to attending the Scarborough Hospital CAC community education session on organ and tissue donation, and I applaud the work of the CAC to promote awareness of this important issue.

Each year, the lives of more than 2,000 Ontarians are saved or enhanced through organ donations. One organ and tissue donor can save eight lives and improve the lives of up to 75 others.

Unfortunately, there are hundreds of people on the wait-list, including 102 Scarborough residents. Every three days, someone on that list dies waiting for a transplant. Unfortunately, less than 25% of eligible Ontarians are registered as donors. In Scarborough, it's only 11%, Mr. Speaker.

In 2012, a constituent of mine, Mohan Bissoondial, founded the Scarborough Gift of Life Association. A double corneal transplant recipient, Mohan has made it his mission to spread donor awareness among Scarborough's diverse community. I want to thank Mohan and his dedicated group of volunteers for promoting awareness of organ and tissue donation.

Speaker, it only takes two minutes to become a donor by signing up online at beadonor.ca. I encourage every eligible Ontarian to be a donor, as each one of us can make a difference in the lives of so many.

TOWN OF GANANOQUE

Mr. Steve Clark: I stand to congratulate the town of Gananoque for recently being recognized as a youth-friendly community by Play Works, an organization that is dedicated to engaging Ontario's youth in their communities.

The town received this award thanks to a group of seven students from Gananoque Intermediate and Secondary School who worked with the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark health unit through the school's co-operative education program in order to determine the youth-friendliness level of the town of Gananoque. They assessed this by conducting youth surveys, interviewing community program co-ordinators, and meeting with municipal leaders.

Through the dedicated research efforts of these students, they determined that Gananoque met the criteria necessary to be designated a Bronze Youth Friendly Community Builder. They prepared and applied for the award, which was presented to the students on March 25 at the annual Parks and Recreation Ontario Awards in

Collingwood by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

This designation acknowledges that the town of Gananoque has a number of excellent programs and services to offer families and youth, and recognizes the positive impact of community-youth partnerships.

I would like to thank the seven students for their hard work in making Gananoque one of only five Ontario communities to receive this designation this year. These students were Brynn Glover, Jill Kellogg, Sierra Williams-Selby, Brie Lackie, Ashley Vanderscheer, Sydney Albertson and Chelsea Heikamp.

I wish warm congratulations to the town of Gananoque for achieving this designation and, again, thank the students, the health unit, the town and all the other partners that played a role in making this possible.

FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is always my privilege to speak in this Legislature, and today I am pleased to address the assembly en français because Oshawa is almost there in achieving designation under the French Language Services Act. We have until May 25 to make comments, and I know we'll be successful.

Oshawa est une communauté riche et diversifiée. J'ai hâte d'avoir l'occasion de reconnaître et de célébrer notre désignation en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français. Je suis honorée de faire partie du processus et d'avoir la chance d'apporter mon soutien à tous ceux et celles qui ont tant lutté pour cette désignation.

1510

Tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes méritent l'égalité d'accès aux services publics, et ceci est une étape importante dans cette direction pour Oshawa. Cela a été un voyage long et ardu pour notre communauté francophone grandissante, et je suis heureuse de voir que leur engagement va finalement être reconnu.

La présente désignation n'est pas pour l'ensemble de la région, mais c'est tout de même un grand pas dans la bonne direction.

Merci, monsieur le Président, et je veux dire félicitations à notre communauté francophone et francophone.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup.

HEALTHY HEART DAY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'm pleased to rise today to discuss the 11th annual Healthy Heart Day that took place in Cambridge this past Saturday, April 18.

Healthy Heart Day was organized by Dr. Shekhar Pandey, a cardiologist at the Cambridge Cardiac Care Centre. Dr. Pandey is committed to the overall awareness of healthy living, and organized this event to provide my constituents the opportunity to learn about what they can do to ensure good heart health.

I joined the survivors' walk, which began bright and early, to celebrate survivors of cardiac conditions. The main event opened at 8:30 in St. Benedict school, and several hundred people attended, to learn about natural strategies for health. Dr. Mike Lawrie discussed the benefits of becoming physically fit.

The keynote lecture, given by Dr. Peter Lin, emphasized a broad concept of healthy living. Dr. Lin encouraged participants to focus on lifestyle changes and preventative measures, such as yoga and healthy eating, that will enrich their lives and improve their cardiac health.

Dr. Pandey's commitment to health is multi-generational. Two of his teenaged sons, Arjun and Avinash, spoke at the 2015 Breathe! Gala in January about their role as budding medical researchers.

The Cambridge Healthy Heart Day was a huge success. I want to thank Dr. Pandey, his team, and all the volunteers for their dedication to a happier and healthier Ontario.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Michael Harris: Yesterday I had the rare opportunity in Ontario to see what it looks like when a government puts the work into getting its fiscal house in order. While the Wynne Liberals wait for that day when, in the words of Justin Trudeau, "the budget will balance itself," Conservatives roll up their sleeves and make the tough decisions for a new balanced budget.

Here in Ontario, after the Liberal government dragged us into a have-not status, we've seen \$14 billion in transfer payments flow from Ottawa, and yet they still can't balance the budget. In fact, as the Harper government balances the books, the Wynne Liberals continue to increase their deficit to a level 68% higher than those of all other provinces and territories combined. Apparently, budgets do not, in fact, balance themselves.

While Ontario suffers through a decade-plus of Liberal waste, mismanagement and scandal, the federal surplus in Ottawa means new opportunities for Canadians. When you get your fiscal house in order, Speaker, you can help families and businesses.

Even as Ontario sells Hydro One to pay off Liberal spending-addiction debts, federal Conservatives are delivering a \$27-billion package of family-focused tax cuts, including an expansion of the universal child care benefit. Now, that's leadership: taking better care of people by first taking care of our economic priorities.

We must also acknowledge the legacy of the late Jim Flaherty.

So while the Liberal regime digs us in deeper to feed their overspending habit tomorrow, people in Ontario can take some solace that there is one level of government looking out for them, and that would be the one on Parliament Hill with a balanced budget.

MAPLEFEST

Mr. Granville Anderson: We are very fortunate in my riding to host a number of street festivals—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. My patience is a little bit over when it comes to the statements. The tradition is to dedicate it to your own riding and things that are happening in your community. I'm going to say that, and now I'm going to say that now everyone will be able to put their statements without interruption, even from your own side. Thank you.

Mr. Granville Anderson: It's one of the benefits of living in a beautiful historic community like Durham. In Bowmanville this weekend, we will be celebrating Maplefest, and what could be more Canadian? Maplefest gives our local business owners, producers and farmers an opportunity to meet the community and expand the efforts of Durham residents to shop locally.

I welcome everyone here at Queen's Park and across Ontario to visit Bowmanville for a hot pancake breakfast, maple doughnuts, cheese, candy, fudge and so much more. I encourage Durham residents to buy local and to enjoy Maplefest this Saturday, starting at 9 a.m. sharp.

FERTILIZER

Mr. Grant Crack: As a former golf course construction supervisor and superintendent, this member's statement is right up my alley.

All members of the House can agree that Ontario's agricultural sector is a driving force behind job creation here in our province. The food grown on our farms in Ontario helps feed the growing population of our province, our country and the world. The farming, food processing and food distribution industry supports nearly 158,000 jobs.

A crucial component of maximizing crop yield is by using fertilizers and supplements. Fertilizers help to replenish essential nutrients in the soil that crops need. Using them in an effective manner helps crops grow while minimizing the impact on the environment.

In fact, the Canadian Fertilizer Institute is taking the lead to ensure that farms across Canada are using fertilizers in a safe and efficient manner, such as the implementation of 4R nutrient stewardship, a strategy to reduce nutrient runoff and minimize greenhouse gas emissions. The principles of the 4R nutrient stewardship are right source, right rate, right time and right place, and this has proven to be an adaptable approach to improving fertilizer use.

The fertilizer industry is currently working with the government of Ontario, the Ontario Agri Business Association and the Grain Farmers of Ontario to promote these principles and to develop a larger research network to further knowledge of these impacts. In my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, MacEwen Agricentre has demonstrated leadership and recently was named the 4R retailer of the year.

Together, we can take steps to ensure that crops grow strong and healthy here in Ontario by receiving the right nutrients and also ensure that the impact to the environment is minimal.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Balkissoon assumes ballot item number 60 and Mrs. Mangat assumes ballot item number 46.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MENINGITIS AWARENESS DAY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE JOUR DE LA SENSIBILISATION À LA MÉNINGITE

Mr. Yakubski moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 90, An Act to proclaim Meningitis Awareness Day / Projet de loi 90, Loi proclamant le Jour de la sensibilisation à la méningite.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now I will ask the member for a short statement.

Mr. John Yakubski: It's going to be short, but I wanted to make sure I got it right: This bill proclaims April 24 in each year as Meningitis Awareness Day.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and Research and Innovation requests to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Minister?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item number 46 be waived.

1520

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister moves that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice

for ballot item number 46 be waived. Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FOREST INDUSTRY

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today during Earth Week to speak about how important the forest industry is to our government and to the province.

Ontario is home to about 71 million hectares of forest and about 85 billion trees. Our forests provide a wide range of benefits to each of us, and I can assure the members of the House of our government's unwavering commitment to our province's forests and to our province's forest industry.

Our government has committed to protecting over 225,000 square kilometres of northern Ontario through the Far North Act, which includes large swaths of the boreal forest. We are committed to sustainable forest management practices that ensure the long-term health of our forests while also supporting economic prosperity for present and future generations. That is why we have put in place a regulatory framework that is grounded in science and that is open and transparent to those that may be affected.

We harvest at sustainable levels. The actual harvest occurs on only 0.6% of the managed forest. This framework includes an independent forest audit on every management unit at regular intervals. Where issues are identified, the ministry takes appropriate action. In fact, through careful environmental stewardship, we're not only protecting our forests and the species that call them home, but we are also helping to create good jobs in Ontario while marketing our world-class forestry sector on the global stage.

Speaker, our forest industry has been at the table with government to ensure that Ontario's rigorous forest management practices promote the long-term health of our forests. Working together, we have become world leaders in sustainable forest management.

Almost 80% of Ontario's managed crown forests are third-party certified—almost 80%. That compares with just 10% globally. Forest certification provides customers with confidence that our wood meets third-party ecological, economic and social standards, and with growing demand for certified wood, Ontario has a significant competitive advantage.

Our government is working to increase awareness of our forest sector's excellent track record, and we're making the right investments to support Ontario's forest industry. In fact, our government has invested over \$1.3 billion in our forest industry through a range of programs, such as the provincial forest access roads funding

program and the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program.

The provincial forest access roads funding program benefits not only the forest industry, but all users. These roads provide essential rural infrastructure for emergency preparedness and response.

We recently announced a permanent investment of up to \$120 million per year under the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program. This certainly may encourage even more investment in Ontario's forestry sector.

We also held the largest wood supply competition in Ontario's history, and we continue to work with municipalities, with aboriginal communities and with the forest industry to modernize our forest tenure system.

Our government launched the Ontario Wood brand, and we're working with industry partners to promote Ontario wood. When they see the Ontario Wood brand, Ontarians will know that they are helping to support jobs in our province, and reducing their environmental impact by using a resource that is both attractive and renewable.

Last September, our government changed the building code to enable wood-framed buildings of up to six storeys. It is estimated that this one policy change alone will result in an increase in sales in the range of \$150 million to \$200 million a year.

We know Ontario's forest industry is more than just lumber. Over the past six years, we have worked with the Bluewater Wood Alliance, a cluster of over 60 secondary wood products producers in southwestern Ontario's traditional furniture and hardwood flooring industry.

We also have a growing wood pellet industry. Last year, the Atikokan generating station completed its conversion. It's now fuelled entirely by wood pellets. Those pellets are being harvested and processed in northern Ontario. Ontario suppliers are also providing wood pellets to international buyers, and there are opportunities to use pellets to replace diesel generation for remote communities.

I am pleased to see increases in the use of biomass energy. Biomass helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigates the effects of climate change.

Our forest industry has been through challenging times in recent years, but we're seeing positive developments. Companies are investing millions in communities like Hornepayne, Atikokan, Ignace, Thunder Bay and others. Greater demand for wood products, increased US housing starts and a lower Canadian dollar are all helping to contribute to the recovery. Ontario's forest products exports are increasing.

We still face challenges, but we're heading in a positive direction. The combination of a market that's on the upswing and our government's ongoing support bodes well for the Ontario forest sector. This is an important sector. It generates over \$11 billion in economic activity and supports over 170,000 people in 260 communities across Ontario, in both the north and in the south as well.

As Ontario's Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, I want to recognize everyone who works in our

industry for their contributions to our province. Ensuring that we maintain sustainable forest management is essential for industry and for our province. We've got an excellent track record, which we continually strive to improve. By doing so, we're protecting our natural environment and securing economic opportunities for present and future generations. Speaker, thank you for your time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I would like to thank the minister for his words on Ontario's sustainable forestry sector.

I know that on this side of the House we are very proud of our forestry sector. I know, as I'm sure the minister does, that when someone buys Ontario wood, that they are buying one of, if not the best, managed natural resources in the world.

We all want forest products that are sourced using sustainable forest management. I am proud of our province's forestry sector for being one of the most sustainable and climate-change-friendly sectors.

As you may or may not know, Mr. Speaker, Ontario's wood products sector harvests 210,000 hectares annually, about one third of 1% of Ontario's forested areas, and three times less than the average amount lost to natural disturbance such as fire, insects and wind.

I know that Ontario's forestry sector takes pride in their work in creating jobs and establishing a sustainable resource for generations to come. Approximately 80% of Ontario's crown lands managed for forest operations in Ontario are certified by independent, internationally recognized certification systems. Our forest practices are governed by a world-class, platinum standard regulatory framework that includes the protection of species at risk and their habitat.

I am proud to say that Ontario's forestry sector maintains a sustainable harvest. In over a span of just five years, forestry companies in Ontario have planted over half a billion trees. That's an average of 131 million trees a year.

The forestry sector affects everyone throughout our province. Today, mills across the province operate and produce a variety of products ranging from newsprint to specialty papers, veneers, cardboards, lumber, plywood and strand board. The forestry sector has produced as much as 3.3 billion board feet of lumber, 7.2 million metric tonnes of pulp and paper, 5.2 billion square feet of panels, veneer and other value-added wood products annually.

The forestry sector employs, both directly and indirectly, 200,000 people across the province. The forestry industry is one of this province's and the country's largest industrial employers.

We know that the sector's future success is dependent on the health of the forest resource, and we congratulate the industry for making tremendous achievements in sustainable forest management. Thanks to their dedication, Ontario's forest practices are among the world's best.

I commend the forestry industry on fully utilizing their resource. Whole logs are used to make lumber, while wood chips left over from the lumber-making process become the raw material for pulp and particleboard. Hog fuel, which contains bark and other wood waste, is burned for energy. Biosolids, which includes wood fibres, the organic by-products of effluent treatment and mineral matter such as clay and lime, are used as soil conditioners on agricultural land.

1530

The forestry industry is a major contributor to the economy in Ontario. For every dollar generated by the industry, approximately 16 cents is paid to the government. In short, the forest industry is helping to meet the economic, environmental and social needs of Canadians without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to carry on the industry.

However, Mr. Speaker, I must also point out that this government needs to do more for the industry. As the forestry sector grows as a result of market rebound, companies are looking to invest in production and create more jobs. Ontario needs to address the elephant in the room—industrial electricity rates. As a primary resource industry, forestry is energy-intensive.

The government has introduced a number of programs that provide some relief from the steady rise in electricity pricing. However, given the government's own projections in the recent long-term energy plan, these benefits are quickly being erased along with any small competitive advantage. A coherent encompassing energy policy will allow manufacturers to reduce costs, make investments and maintain jobs. We must ensure that our industry remains in Ontario instead of moving to cheaper jurisdictions such as Quebec. Ontario must have competitive energy rates.

The minister and this government know that Ontario's sustainable forestry sector, with proper public policy, such as that brought forward by Nipissing member Vic Fedeli's wood frame buildings act a year or two ago—congratulations, Vic—competitive measures and competitive electricity rates will continue to flourish and our forestry sector will maintain jobs for generations to come.

On behalf of the PC Party, I'd like to thank those who work in the forestry industry for their contribution to our province.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On behalf of the New Democrats and our leader Andrea Horwath, I want to first of all acknowledge that those who work in the forest industry, quite frankly, are a good example of how we can green our planet. A lot of people don't know the story, but the forest industry has been, for years, managing the forests in such a way that allows for the regeneration of oxygen on this planet probably beyond what people recognize.

We have been managing our forests in this province in a sustainable way for years. We have done that in such a way that watches the ecosystem to make sure that not only do we have a healthy forest when it comes to being able to harvest trees—and really, this is what this is, it's a

harvesting business. It's somewhat like farming except the flowers and the wheat are a little bit bigger. They're growing trees, but what we end up with is also a very healthy forest where animals and fauna are taken into account to make sure that we protect them as we do our forest activities. We've been doing this in northern Ontario, through our forest industry, for some years now.

I can tell you that, as a northerner, I get frustrated because a lot of people don't realize we're at the vanguard of this and sometimes we're accused, in northern Ontario and in the forest industry, of somehow being opposed to the greening of our planet and making sure that we do things right on the environmental side. I'm just here to say, we've been doing it for years and we'd like to have a little bit of recognition for that every now and then.

The other thing I want to say is that the minister says—and I want to say this in as gentle a way I can because I will be extremely critical. The government says, “Oh, there's such an importance to this industry, and this government knows that.” Well, you've got a funny way of showing it because, if you look at what industry has had to do for a number of years now, since the beginning of this Liberal administration, it has been to spend more time lobbying us, members of this assembly on all sides of the House, in order to deal with the myriad of things that this government has done that, quite frankly, have not led to a more efficient harvest, have not led to a more efficient industry, have not led to building a stronger economy, but have led to us having to basically try to protect what it is we've been doing for a long time, which is sustainable forest redevelopment.

I look at the government across the way and I think of the many things we've had to deal with, and I'm just going to go through a couple of them. The government says they've put in place the northern industrial program when it comes to electricity. Well, electricity prices used to be three times less than what they are now at the beginning of this privatization scheme. The very fact that the government had to put this program in place—and I've got to say it's necessary. If you didn't have that plan, there's a number of mills in my riding that would close their doors, as we've seen in Iroquois Falls, where that mill has closed its doors because we can't afford the electricity prices.

But the point I make is this: The very fact that the government has got to put those programs in place speaks to the lack and wrongheadedness of the policy when it comes to electricity in the province of Ontario and how it's really affected the bottom line of being able to operate in this industry and others.

The government crows that they've been able to invest in roads that lead to the forest when it comes to being able to do what we have to do in the forest. Well, it was the government in their own budget that withdrew money that was much-needed in order to be able to support the industry when it comes to making sure that we build roads that not only the industry uses—and this is the point—but local residents and other utilizers of the forest

use as well. It is everybody from the cottager to the people who pick blueberries to the First Nations people to the people who want to go hunt and fish to people who are in the exploration industry. Those roads are used by many people, and what we have is a government that says, “Well, we're going to slow down the tap when it comes to supporting this industry.”

We have no difficulty and I support making sure that we build infrastructure when we build new plants, whether it be a car plant or whatever in southern Ontario, because that is the cost of economic development. Governments come to the table; they provide what is much-needed infrastructure when it comes to attracting those investments. But where we do have the investment here already, industry has had to be at Queen's Park for the last 12 years to lobby to stop the erosion of the support of the infrastructure that is so needed within their industry when it comes to regulation, when it comes to legislation, when it comes to electricity prices and when it comes to what goes on generally in the industry.

So I say to my friends that are here today, there is hope. You've survived this long. You've survived this long because, quite frankly, you guys know what you're doing and you've been very effective. You've had good communities. You've had good partnerships with the people in the communities where your establishments are in the forest industry, be it a sawmill or a paper mill or whatever it might be. But we will continue working together because we understand, in northern Ontario, the importance of making sure that this industry not only stays, but that it prospers and that we allow the growth of this industry to go in a way that quite frankly it has not been able to for some time.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015; and

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 per person that doesn't necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart meter program that failed to conserve energy, and households are paying almost \$700 more annually for unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

“Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating; and

“Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

“Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to

raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To abandon the idea of introducing yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses."

That's a year old but it's still very, very pertinent. Thank you, and I will sign it.

SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILDREN

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition called "Maintain the John McGivney Children's Centre Preschool Program."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the John McGivney Children's Centre annually helps about 2,500 children with physical, neurological and developmental challenges;

"Whereas the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program is an exceptional program administered by expert faculty and staff that offers youth and their families a transformative experience that they would not receive in a less specialized setting;

"Whereas the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program faces a shortfall in provincial funding;

"Whereas families raising children with special needs incur increased costs for care which the income test does not properly reflect;

"Whereas compliance with the provincial requirements means that the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program is unable to be sustained;

"Whereas the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program closure will mean a loss of a valued skill set of expertise from teachers and support staff in our community that will leave some of the area's most vulnerable children and families without proper child care;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To make up any funding shortfalls that result from transitioning to a fee subsidy model so that the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program can remain operational and consider changes the income test to better reflect the increased costs families raising children with special needs incur."

I fully support this, will sign my name to it and give it to page Ishika.

1540

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with the petition, affix my name and give it to page Mira to bring forward.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Auditor General of Ontario defines the global adjustment charge on hydro bills as 'an extra payment covered by ratepayers over and above the actual market price of electricity'; and

"Whereas wind power is simply unreliable, blows mostly at night when we don't need power, creating a surplus Ontario then has to get rid of by paying Quebec and the United States to take it, and the total cost of producing the exported power was about \$2.6 billion more than the revenue Ontario received from exporting that power between 2006 and 2013; and

"Whereas the Auditor General says the global adjustment has risen from \$700 million prior to the Green Energy Act to \$7.7 billion by 2013, and over the past decade, the cumulated amount is about \$50 billion; and

"Whereas Ontario now has the highest industrial rates in North America, and residential hydro bills are forecast to increase 42% by 2018 after peak hydro rates have already more than tripled since 2003; and

"Whereas local First Nations, property owners and aviation and aerospace industry stakeholders have voiced concerns about wind farm installations proposed by Innergex in Merrick and Mattawan townships in the riding of Nipissing;

"We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to reverse course on these proposed wind projects and the government's expensive energy policy by cancelling feed-in-tariff (FIT) subsidies, implementing an immediate moratorium on wind power development, and giving municipalities veto authority over wind projects in their communities."

I agree with this, sign my name and give it page Joshua.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas northern Ontario communities are connected across long distances by bus service; and

"Whereas the ONTC bus service is the only form of public transportation available to many northern ... residents; and

"Whereas reduction of customer service and the closure of stations will cause deterioration of the overall system of public transportation of passengers and goods in northeastern Ontario; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario committed to providing enhanced bus service to alleviate the loss of the ONTC passenger rail service;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Ontario Northland Transportation Commission bus service must be enhanced to ensure reliable and continuous accessibility including uniform provision of adequate public transportation for all communities and people of northern Ontario."

I wholeheartedly agree and pass this petition to page Joshua.

LEGAL AID

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is a petition titled "Population-Based Legal Services Funding.

"Whereas Mississauga Community Legal Services provides free legal services to legal aid clients within a community of nearly 800,000 population; and

"Whereas legal services in communities like Toronto and Hamilton serve, per capita, fewer people living in poverty, are better staffed and better funded; and

"Whereas Mississauga and Brampton have made progress in having Ontario provide funding for human services on a fair and equitable, population-based model;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of the Attorney General revise the current distribution of allocated funds ... and adopt a population-based model, factoring in population growth rates to ensure Ontario funds are allocated in an efficient, fair and effective manner."

I agree with this. I shall put my name to it and give it to page Samantha.

YOUTH SERVICES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas current provisions of the Child and Family Services Act prevent a children's aid society from arranging temporary care for 16- and 17-year-olds who seek their assistance and have not been previously in care; and

"Whereas the inability to arrange care in a stable and nurturing family can expose youth to the risk of homelessness, criminality, poor education outcomes, and deteriorating physical and mental health; and

"Whereas at-risk 16- and 17-year-old youths without care can impose a greater cost on social service providers than the cost of arranging for two years of temporary care; and

"Whereas the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has repeatedly asked for 16- and 17-year-old

youths to be able to seek CAS assistance regarding temporary care; and

"Whereas Bill 88 won all-party support during the 40th Parliament and was reported back to the House for third reading by the Standing Committee on Social Policy;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To pass Bill 54, the Right to Care Act."

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Luca.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have those thousands of petitions that come from pretty near every hospital in Ontario, and they read as follows—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse my interruption. That needs to be removed from your desk.

M^{me} France Gélinas: My petitions?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Where should I put them?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just set them down. That's it. Now you've got it. It's the ones you were facing out.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Am I good now?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You'll lose them if it continues. Carry on.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. I have those petitions that come from every hospital in Ontario. They read as follows:

"Whereas for seven years Ontario public hospitals have been deliberately underfunded and the last three years the hospital base budgets were frozen; and

"Whereas this is no way to achieve health care transformation in Ontario; and

"Whereas as health care professionals and support staff, we see our hospital administrators forced to make difficult decisions that adversely impact our patients and erode quality care;"

They ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario "to urgently restore sustainable funding to our public hospitals and begin the process of capacity planning so that we can all work together towards a carefully planned, highly performing public health system."

It was collected by members of OPSEU. I thank them, will support it, affix my name and ask Mira to bring it to the Clerk.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, coming from quite a number of people in Thunder Bay, Caledon and Georgetown. This is among the thousands we've been receiving from all over Ontario called "Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water." It reads as follow:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most-frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, a concentration providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentration to protect against adverse health effects; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to send it down with page Samantha.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas climate change, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an internationally accepted authority on climate change, has concluded that the warming of the Earth's climate system is unequivocal, and primarily driven by human activity;

"Whereas the Ontario government has pledged to adopt a carbon pricing policy as a first step in reducing our provincial carbon emissions by 80% by 2050;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to adopt the carbon pricing policy called Carbon Fee and Dividend, as the most economy-friendly, fastest, most transparent, least costly, most just and fair way to cut carbon emissions and assist Ontario citizens in the transition to a low-carbon environment."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has made positron emission tomography (PET) scanning a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients

under conditions where PET scans have been proven to be clinically effective;

"Whereas, since October 2009, insured PET scans are performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with Health Sciences North, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through Health Sciences North, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature to this petition and give it to page Mira.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have another petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most-frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I agree with the petition, affix my signature and give it to page Chloe.

OPPOSITION DAY

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Jim Wilson: I move that, given the grave financial situation in the province of Ontario today, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario agree that the 2015 budget should include the following elements:

—an announcement that the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan will not be pursued, as it places an enormous burden on businesses and will kill jobs in this province;

—a commitment that a carbon tax, or its close cousin, a cap-and-trade process, not be adopted, as it is a cost that Ontario residents and businesses cannot afford;

—a plan to fix home care by streamlining the system to reduce the number of agencies patients must deal with and by tying community care access funding to outcomes and clearly defined results;

—a commitment to reduce energy prices so that all people and businesses no longer have to be paying some of the highest energy costs in North America; and finally

—a serious, credible and detailed plan to balance the budget by 2017-18.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Wilson has moved opposition day number three.

Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Jim Wilson: The Ontario PC caucus put forward this motion today because we're gravely concerned about the direction this province is going in under the Liberal government and very wary regarding what will be in the government's budget tomorrow.

This government has a history of fiscal mismanagement and a chronic spending problem. Their years of bad spending decisions are beginning to show up in the reductions to services that we're seeing across the province.

A number of weeks ago in this House I spoke of the size of the provincial debt and gave some examples of what services were being crowded out as a result of the interest payments on the \$288 billion worth of debt.

I said that we believed the Liberal government could do much better in its 2015 budget than it did in 2014, and, to help them to improve their fiscal performance and better deliver services, we would raise a number of key issues and suggestions to be included in tomorrow's budget.

Over the last few weeks, my colleagues and I have raised five different issues and put forward five sensible solutions. We've asked the government to include them in the 2015 budget to be delivered tomorrow. Only by embracing the direction we have laid out will the province begin to turn the corner, stop hurting people and start on a path to a better economy that will create jobs.

Again, the five items we asked the government to commit to in its budget are:

First, an announcement that the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan will not be pursued, as it places an enormous burden on businesses and individuals and will kill jobs in this province. The finance ministry's own internal

documents show that it will kill at least 18,000 jobs in its first year of introduction. This mandatory plan is another tax on both employers and their employees. It will mean less money today in people's pockets, which will affect their spending and ultimately affect the entire economy. The government is yet again trying to tell people how to spend their money. Mr. Speaker, most people know they have to save for their retirement. In fact, a study by the McKinsey consulting group reports that 83% of Canadians are already saving adequate amounts for their retirement. Any new proposal should be focusing on the 17% remaining who need a little bit more help with saving for their retirement. On top of all of this, the government has yet to provide a definition of what a comparable pension plan might be. Who knows what will happen with existing pension plans? I urge the government to take the opportunity tomorrow to say you have seen the light and tell us you will not be going ahead with this plan.

Our second ask is a commitment that a pay-to-pollute carbon tax or its close cousin, a cap-and-trade process, not be adopted, as it is a cost that Ontario residents and businesses cannot afford. This is merely another misguided tax that will create even more of a financial burden than people are already carrying. In the jurisdictions where it has been tried, cap and trade and carbon pricing have been a failure and have increased costs for all ratepayers while doing almost nothing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In last year's election, the Premier told the people of Ontario that she wouldn't implement a carbon tax. She should have stuck to this promise, but she does still have an opportunity to make up for what she's been saying about the tax recently and to tell the people in tomorrow's budget that she won't go ahead with this nonsense.

Our third request is a plan to fix home care by streamlining the system to reduce the number of agencies and the layers of bureaucracy that patients must deal with by tying community care access centre funding outcomes with clearly defined results. Health care providers, stakeholders, patients and their families have said that the system is broken. Currently, home care services are inadequate and inconsistent. If it's this bad today, what will it be like when we have even more seniors in the system? The Donner report, a recent report issued by the government, highlighted that the two biggest issues with today's home care system are excessive bureaucracy and a lack of accountability for system outcomes. This report and these issues must be addressed, and soon. Again, Mr. Speaker, we hope these will be addressed in tomorrow's budget.

Our fourth ask is a serious, credible and detailed plan to balance the budget by 2017-18. It's desperately needed. All we've heard on this subject to date are platitudes and numbers that don't add up. In fact, this government hasn't even been able to keep its own deficit numbers straight. Rather than reducing the deficit as they claim, the deficit has actually been rising, going from \$9.2 billion in the 2012-13 fiscal year to \$10.5 billion in

the 2013-14 fiscal year, to this year at \$10.9 billion. Dealing with the deficit has been done on a wing and a prayer, and if the province is to have a hope of turning its finances around, there needs to be a solid plan put in place immediately. Interest payments on the debt are beginning to crowd out critical front-line services like health care and education. Over the last number of weeks, we've seen 249 nurses laid off, 250 teaching positions lost in Toronto alone, and 118 teachers lost in Kawartha, to state just a few examples.

1600

Finally, we ask for a commitment to reduce electricity prices so that all people and businesses no longer have to be paying some of the highest energy costs in North America. Every time we turn around, hydro rates are going up. Just on Monday, we heard that rates will rise by 15% on May 1. The government's wasteful spending on the Green Energy Act and the awarding of FIT energy contracts are but two of the reasons that electricity prices are skyrocketing here in Ontario by more than \$1,100 a year for the average homeowner. This amount is without either Monday's announcement or the increases that will result from the privatization of a majority share of Hydro One. Clearly, real action needs to be taken, and needs to be taken now, to reduce electricity prices and bring back manufacturing and create jobs in this province.

In conclusion, as I said in March, this government needs to get its fiscal house in order—my colleagues say it every day—and we need to stop making the people of Ontario carry the burden for this overspending and lack of financial control. My caucus colleagues and I have presented five sensible solutions to assist this government. We'll be hoping and watching to see that they're in the budget tomorrow. I urge all members of this House to support our motion this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say up front that we, as New Democrats, will not be supporting this motion, and I want to get into some of the reasons why.

Let me just start with essentially what the Tories are saying here. The Conservatives are suggesting essentially four actions that lead toward a balanced budget in 2017-18. I would argue that these things in themselves are not going to do the savings in order to balance the budget in 2017-18, but I'll give them some leeway on that.

The Conservatives are suggesting a number of things that, quite frankly, I am opposed to and my colleagues are opposed to for a number of reasons. Let me first of all get into what they're saying in point number 4. They say, "A commitment to reduce energy prices...." Nowhere in what they're saying today are they saying that they're opposed to the privatization of Hydro One.

I think that most people living in Ontario understand that privatization is going to raise rates in this province, and it's going to raise them in the same way we've seen by what the government did, which was started under the Conservatives with the deregulation and privatization on

the generation side, and what the Liberals have accelerated.

Let me just give you this—I know that members of this assembly mostly understand this, but I'm not so sure that the public understands this. Ontario, prior to the Mike Harris attempt to privatize and the Ernie Eves attempt to privatize the system, used to generate about 25,000 megawatts. Our total generation capacity was roughly 25,000 megawatts. At a time when the economy of Ontario was doing rather well, our demand was somewhere around 19,000 to 21,000 megawatts. Yes, there were some times that the demand went above that, but generally it was 19,000 to 21,000 megawatts.

The Conservatives first, followed by the Liberals who really accelerated this, signed private power deals with their friends in the private sector in order to build energy projects that generate electricity at a much higher cost than we see our public assets delivering energy. For example, from falling water at the Niagara Falls dams at Beck or on the Mattagami River, or wherever they might be, we're able to generate electricity for around 3.5 to 4 cents per kilowatt hour. If you look at our nuclear plants, they're able to generate electricity at about 5 to 6 cents per kilowatt hour. Our total capacity, between the nuclear side—what used to be the complete nuclear side, because we privatized Bruce—and the hydroelectric side, used to be somewhere around 15,000 to 16,000 megawatts. The government, by way of its privatization schemes under the Conservatives and by way of privatization under the Liberals, has increased the capacity of the system by 10,000 to 12,000 megawatts—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm having trouble hearing the speaker. It's really loud on the opposition side. If you guys could keep it down a few decibels, I'd appreciate it. Thanks.

Go ahead.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Speaker.

My point is that these private power deals they've signed have increased the capacity of our system by about 10,000 to 12,000 megawatts at a time when the demand went down. Everybody knows that you don't increase capacity in a system when your demand is going down. Yes, you refurbish what you have when it comes to your various hydro facilities, but you don't add capacity in the way that we did.

Currently we're using sometimes, on average, between 14,000 and 16,000 megawatts at any one time in our system, and our system is able to generate about 30,000 to 35,000 megawatts depending on what's running on that particular day. We are forced, by the signing of private power deals, to buy electricity from much more expensive producers when we could do it ourselves.

If you wonder why your hydro bill has gone through the roof, you can thank Michael Harris and you can thank Mr. Eves from the Conservative Party, you can thank Dalton McGuinty and you'll certainly be able to thank the Premier, Ms. Wynne, when it comes to what they're doing on the privatization side.

We are buying electricity that, first of all, we don't need because we have enough capacity in our public system. And what's worse is, we are locked into buying it whether we need it or not. So when Ontario needs 14,000 megawatts of power, we run the water through the dams by not running our generators, or we run our generators at our dams as motors. At our nuclear facilities, we're actually venting steam because we're not buying the nuclear power from them at times because we have to buy power at two, three and four times the cost from the private power deals that they've signed.

Now this government is trying to make us believe that privatizing Hydro One is going to lead to efficiencies and save us all kinds of money. Well, I've seen what the efficiencies have done to my hydro bill. People across this province have seen what that has done to their hydro bills. Privatization has led to higher hydro prices, industries have had to shut down, such as Xstrata in Timmins and many more across this province, and people can't afford it.

One of the concerns, I have to say, in this motion—and this is one of the key reasons I will not vote for this motion—is that they talk about a commitment to reduce energy prices. How are you going to do that? Are you prepared to cancel those private power deals that you guys are so fond of? Absolutely not.

Interjection: Yes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Don't tell me yes, because I know what Conservatives stand for. Are you prepared to stand up and oppose the privatization of Hydro One for the reason that going to the private sector is going to save you more money? In this case, the Liberals have outflanked the Tories and are moving farther to the right when it comes to the issue of what they're doing on hydro.

Interjection:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: In home care, they're talking about fixing the problems by streamlining the system. I remember what happened the last time they tried to streamline the system under the Conservative government of Mike Harris: We privatized a large part of our community care system when it came to providing services in the home. We're not spending less money because we privatized the system; we are spending more money because we privatized the system. Because they're limiting the amount of money that is able to be spent in the community care access system now, it means to say that we're rationing services to patients who need it in their homes and residents who need to be supported in their homes because we're spending a larger share of the public dollars of our health care system not on the patients but in the profit that the Conservatives set up by privatizing a large part of the community care access centres.

I will not vote for this motion because what the Conservatives are talking about is more of the same: more right-wing ideology, more privatization—something that it is proven, time and time again, doesn't work.

Then they say that they're opposed to the carbon tax, as they call it. Let's all agree on one thing. There's a thing called global warming in this province. I'm going to argue that yes, this province has done a lot up to now when it comes to being able to deal with both emissions in the air and emissions in our water.

I look at Sudbury, Mr. Speaker—and I'm sure you've been there a number of times. If you went to Sudbury—

Interjection:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): All right. The member from Renfrew might want to turn his chair around and he might want to get back in his seat if he wants to be loud. I'll be warning him next time.

Continue.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I say again, Mr. Speaker, that if you had taken the time 30 or 35 years ago to go to Sudbury, and you go there today, it is night and day. Sudbury is a much greener, much cleaner place than we saw 30 and 35 years ago.

You used to drive into Sudbury—the Americans, during the lunar landing of Apollo and during the Gemini program, were sending their astronauts to Sudbury in order to practise walking on the moon because Sudbury was so polluted that it looked like the face of the moon.

But today when you go to Sudbury it's a very different city. It's a city with trees. It's a city with greenery. It's a city that has very much revitalized itself when it comes to the environment. Why? Because governments over the years, of all stripes, understood that part of the responsibility we have is to have laws and regulations in this province that deal adequately with making sure we do all we can, given the technology we've got and the capacity we can bring to bear to make our planet greener and make our environment greener.

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The carbon tax—what do they call it again?

Interjection: Cap and trade.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The cap-and-trade system, I will argue, is not the be-all and end-all that's going to resolve the entire issue of what goes on with our planet as far as what's going on with our environment. But the two points I want to make are, we've done a lot over the years to clean it up. The carbon—

Interjection: Cap and trade.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The cap-and-trade system is a system that will allow us to put a carrot when it comes to having those industrial polluters do the right thing, which is invest in those technologies that are necessary to be able to green.

The last part I want to leave on—and I've just got two, three minutes—is the Ontario registered pension plan. The Conservatives are opposed to people who do not have pensions getting a defined pension plan. In this case, the ORPP is a very small step forward but a very important step forward. We, as New Democrats, through Andrea Horwath, our leader, and others, have advocated for a CPP-style system for a long time. We've argued that we should try to partner with the federal government in order to augment the Canada pension system, so that

workers, when they retire, are able to get a defined benefit when it comes to their retirement.

We know that if you're in an RRSP system, as we are here in the House—there's not a Conservative member who's going to tell me they'd rather be in an RRSP system versus a defined pension system. I think there's not a Conservative in the House, not a New Democrat in the House and not a Liberal in the House who would argue that an RRSP system is better than a defined pension system.

A defined pension is always the best way to go. The question is, how do you build that defined pension so that it's fully funded, that it has the ability to provide a good benefit, that it's secure and not so expensive that you're not able to pay for it?

Mr. Speaker, I must say that I've not only spoken against this particular motion, but I just want to say that I will be voting against it for the reasons put forward. What we have are the Conservatives who are ideologically saying the same thing. The only answer is to privatize and sell it, the same way that the Liberals have now adopted the Conservative position. It is funny to watch. We have Liberals who are outflanking the Conservatives on the right and now wrapping themselves in that same ideology, that same language, that the only thing you can do to build transit is to sell off hydro. I just say that \$4 billion that you're going to get for the sale, you've already spent it. You need almost \$30 billion to invest in infrastructure.

The province has, will continue and always did fund our capital infrastructure needs, when it comes to what needs to be done, by way of loans and other mechanisms. It's not like the province doesn't spend anything at all. Should we invest in these transit projects? Absolutely. Kitchener-Waterloo has been looking, and it's been a very big disappointment. Yesterday, they didn't get what they were supposed to get, and the same thing in Niagara.

There are ways of financing this that don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. That sell off of hydro for \$4 billion allows us not to raise the kind of dollars we need to invest in these systems and puts us in a situation where we lose control over a public asset, and everybody's hydro bill, yet again, goes through the roof.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, two generations ago, in an iconic film of its era, there was an expression that the film's antagonists used when they felt they ought to get their way. They'd say of the other party, "Make him an offer he can't refuse." Now, the micromanagers in Prime Minister Harper's office, who dictate the memos that govern every thought, word and deed the Ontario PC Party uses, used parallel language when they ordered the Ontario PC Party to make the government an offer they couldn't accept.

Let's look at the five either false or patently silly premises of today's opposition day motion. It's Canadian and Ontario Conservatives who continue to strive to make 99% of Canadians the economic servants of the

richest 1%. There is no more certain way to keep ordinary Canadians snapping at one another while they fight over the table scraps of the wealthy than to deny working families any hope at all of a secure retirement after a long working life.

Your pensions and your savings, when the Canada Pension Plan was first introduced, used to have to last between a few years and perhaps a decade following retirement. Now it's double or triple that time, even as the value of the half-century-old Canada Pension Plan has failed to keep pace with the times. The responsible thing for the party opposite to have introduced in this opposition day motion would have been to petition the federal government to simply adopt the proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and to enhance the Canada Pension Plan, to make the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan the law all across the country and to make the Canada Pension Plan truly a useful tool. But they didn't do that. Will this government abandon young and working families to golden years that the neo-cons would turn to lead? Absolutely not.

Other than ideologically driven Conservatives, the rest of the world fully accepts that climate change is bringing ruin to every region of this planet and is going to lead to the extinction of some of our world's signature species. One such species are Canadian polar bears, who increasingly drown while searching for food, see their cubs starve or resort to cannibalism. Ontario will join other responsible jurisdictions and put a price on polluting carbon emissions. This province rejects the PC Party proposal to neglect our environment.

Ontario PCs have had an opportunity to support the most comprehensive and wide-ranging program of reforms and funding to long-term care that Ontario has ever seen. Conservatives have consistently stalled legislation to benefit seniors with repetitive and lengthy debate in this Legislature. They have robotically voted against the very legislation that seniors need, and they have urged budget cuts that would strip Ontario seniors of care. This government rejects the Conservative ideology of telling seniors that they are on their own in their declining years, and we reject this PC Party proposal.

No governing party in North American history did a worse job of messing up a strong electricity generation and transmission system than did the Ontario Conservatives. For the benefit of the viewing audience, here are the four pillars of Conservative energy policy:

(1) Do nothing. Run your generation and transmission system into the ground by spending nothing on the upkeep and expansion of your power plants and your transmission lines.

(2) Burn coal. It is truly quick and dirty, never mind the health of the people in Ontario cities, and our air quality be damned.

(3) Buy expensive power from the United States generated, ironically, from burning fossil fuels, and stick the electricity ratepayer with the environmental health cost. That, by the way, is how you got your stranded debt.

(4) When all else fails, and it always fails, just blame everybody else.

Ontario saw that story for eight long, lost years. We're not going back there and we reject this proposal outright. And by the way, Ontario power prices are competitive right now. Ontario is completing expensive power production and transmission renewal that most other jurisdictions have not yet even started.

Finally, no government in Canada boasts Ontario's track record of success in always beating its deficit reduction targets: not the feds, not Alberta and not any other province. No Conservative government produced three consecutive budget surpluses, as this government did in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The serious, credible plan to balance Ontario's budget was laid out fully in the 2009-10 Ontario budget. It has worked. It is on schedule to achieve a balanced Ontario budget within three years.

There is not one point in today's opposition day motion that either merits support or is rooted in fact. This government will vote against it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, our deficit three years ago was a whopping \$9.2 billion. Instead of reining spending in, spending within our means, it grew to \$10.5 billion. If that wasn't enough of a wake-up call, the government continued spending and it went to \$10.9 billion. Now we've heard from Moody's, who downgraded us, Fitch, who downgraded us, and others who have given us a downgrade and moved us from "stable" to "negative." The Conference Board of Canada, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian federation of business—all have weighed in, telling the province to drastically change their pattern.

1620

The Auditor General said it best. She said, in her annual report in December, that if you don't dramatically change the path that you're on, you'll begin to crowd out the core services that Ontarians rely on. And that is exactly what's happening in Ontario. Everything she said would happen is happening. I have stood in this Legislature and talked about the fact that in my hometown of North Bay, 94 full-time front-line health care workers, including 54 nurses, were fired this year—full-time; plus, 34 part-time were fired at our hospital. Forty-three workers at Ontario Northland—fired. Fifty-four workers at Nipissing University, including 22 professors—all fired because this government can't balance their budget.

So our interim leader, Jim Wilson, has put forth five solid, credible ideas to help us move Ontario forward. We talked about the Ontario registered pension plan. Again, Speaker, all of the bodies that I mentioned have spoken negatively about the proposed pension tax. In fact, the government's own Ministry of Finance documents tell us that this will cost us 18,000 jobs minimum, and up to 54,000 jobs—18,000 for every \$2 billion taken out of the system. This is horrendous. I don't know what you have to do to shake these guys, to say, "You're costing up jobs at every single turn. Every time you think

you're helping us, you cost us jobs." Here's some advice: Stop helping. Thank you. Just stop helping.

The cap-and-trade tax is an interesting one. Again, their own document, cabinet advice—"confidential advice to cabinet" is actually what it's called—tells them, "Do this and it costs you 5,000 jobs right off the bat. That's what it's going to cost." The price of gasoline and the price of everything go up. It's a tax on everything. Does something need to be done? Yes, but the method that they're doing it has nothing—nothing whatsoever—to do with addressing climate change or addressing emissions. It's all about ringing in some cash—ringing in more cash from the public so they can attempt to balance their budget. It's the only way they can.

The budget is going the wrong way: \$9.2 billion, 10.5 billion, \$10.9 billion; they're in the cellar. They're in the cellar, Speaker. So they're going about that the wrong way. What they're going to be doing is taking the temperature, let's call it, of a company on the level of their emissions, putting a cap on that, and then if that company goes over, what happens, of course, is that they have to go out and buy. So they can go to California to a company that has lowered their emissions there and can buy credits from there. It's all about money. It's all about money.

In fact, here's how it limits companies in Ontario: A company that's producing X amount of emissions—why would they ever want to expand and grow their business? They'll be creating more emissions along with those jobs. Why would they ever expand in Ontario? They won't be expanding here ever again—something that has happened in the past.

We had 2,700 fewer businesses in Ontario last year than the year before. You'd think that would shake you up and tell you, "Holy crackers, something is wrong with the way we're doing things." You would think that's what this Liberal government would say. But no, it's, "Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead." That's what they do: tax and spend, tax and spend.

Speaker, the third plan was to talk about fixing home care by streamlining the system to reduce the number of agencies that patients must deal with, and by tying the CCAC—community care access centre—funding so that all the people and businesses no longer have to be involved in the long wait times that we have. That's the problem that we have. So we put a credible plan forward.

The fourth was our energy costs. We have the highest energy rates in North America to go along with the pension tax, where we already have the highest payroll taxes in Canada. I have no idea how the government continues to say, "Our hydro rates are normal. Our hydro rates are fine. Our hydro rates are average." I just don't understand how they can get away with saying that when we have the highest energy rates in all of North America, period.

Just yesterday or the day before, the government announced, the OEB announced, that hydro rates for peak times are going up 15%. Speaker, that's one day—a 15% increase. Our rates have already tripled. With the next rate increase, our rates will have quadrupled since the

day this government took office. That's why we've lost 300,000 people who used to work in manufacturing. They're gone. They're gone, Speaker. Nobody on that side seems to care—a 15% increase.

All three parties, when we toured on the pre-budget consultations, heard from Jennifer in Ottawa. She told us, "I have to shut my power off from 6 in the morning to noon every day and again from 3 in the afternoon to 7 every night," just so she could pay her bills. She had to choose—

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's right.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: That's Jennifer. Do you remember Jennifer? She has to choose between heat or eat; between food or fuel. That's the Ontario that the Liberals have created.

We're asking them in our last ask to present to us a serious, credible and detailed plan to balance the budget by 2017-18.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm certainly pleased to rise this afternoon. I want to talk to my PC colleagues, who are calling for a commitment to reduce energy prices so that all people and businesses no longer have to be paying some of the highest energy costs in North America. If the PCs want to do this, then they must also be against the sell-off of Ontario's hydro assets.

The first of these sell-offs began under the Mike Harris government. Since then, hydro rates have gone up 300%. Our small businesses and our manufacturers in our constituency in Niagara Falls cannot accept higher hydro rates. We must make sure that hydro is not privatized and the rates do not increase. We support manufacturers, we support businesses, and we'll continue to fight against high hydro rates. So remember this: Selling off hydro may balance your budget in the short term, but once those assets are gone, they are gone forever—gone forever.

I just got this, Mr. Speaker. The Welland Tribune today: hydro rates hurt Niagara businesses. The Blue Star Restaurant—and I'm sure that some of my colleague Liberals and PCs have been to beautiful Welland and been to the Blue Star. It has been in business for 60 years. Do you know what they're paying for hydro per month in a small business? It's \$4,000 a month. Can you imagine what will happen to that rate if it's privatized? The government on the other side is not saying, "Hydro rates are going to go down if we privatize." They won't make that commitment.

Here are other ones struggling to stay open: Brunner Manufacturing, a small manufacturer that does brake parts in Niagara Falls with 70 employees. It has been in the community for almost 30 years, owned by one person, Peter Brunner. He's saying that they're struggling to stay open and maybe threatening 70 jobs because of hydro rates.

Rodeway Inn in Niagara Falls: It's a huge hit to their bottom line.

Privatizing hydro: The message should be clear that once you privatize it, we no longer own it. The residents of Ontario no longer own it. We lose it forever, and it's a mistake. The PCs should know it as well as the Liberals.

1630

Today the Liberals said that there will be no cuts to education and that there will be none in the budget. If this is the case—and I'm glad the education minister is here—what happened at Parliament Oak, where the residents had to fight to keep their school open; a community hub, the very fabric of that little community? They're closing the school. Think about it: 88 other schools have been closed since 2011. The PCs are calling for a balanced budget in 2017-18. Right now, the budget deficit is to the tune of 10 billion—that's with a B—dollars. The Auditor General reported—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: That's not us.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's going to come to you. I'll give you a second here.

The Auditor General reported that P3s have cost this province \$8 billion more than if those services had been given to public institutions. Think about this, because my colleagues over here support P3s. And what I'm saying is, if you want to have a balanced budget, let's take a look at P3s. Take a look at the hospitals, because we're going to build a hospital in Niagara Falls. We're going to build a hospital—

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It would be interesting if they just listened instead of talked, because it's important to listen to this.

The hospital built in Peterborough that was publicly funded and publicly delivered cost \$350 million. The same type of hospital built in St. Catharines, with the same number of beds and around the same square footage, cost \$1 billion. So why don't we build it, publicly fund it and publicly deliver it? We can build it in Niagara Falls, have local workers, local engineers and local small businesses putting people back to work. Take that \$650 million that we're going to waste on a P3 and put it right back into front-line health care so we don't have to close hospitals in Niagara-on-the-Lake, in Fort Erie and in Welland. That's what we should be doing with P3s.

I'm glad the Minister of Transportation is here, because what we need in this budget is GO trains all the way to Niagara Falls. It is a game-changer.

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Please.

This is a game-changer for Niagara Falls. The transportation minister is here today. His Premier—and I want my colleagues in the Conservative Party to listen to this. The Premier came into my riding during the election and said this—and it was only a few months ago: "GO to Niagara is a high, high priority." Now, think about that: "GO to Niagara is a high, high priority."

Then you take a look at what my good colleague from St. Catharines says. He says that he'd see it in 2015. So I'm saying, in the budget that's coming tomorrow, let's not forget about Niagara. It's a beautiful part of the prov-

ince of Ontario; you have an obligation to get GO down there. Let's get it done.

I've only got 30 seconds left. The other thing that I wanted to make sure is talked about in the budget is that we have to make sure that we protect the auto sector, protect the footprint that's going to run out in 2016, so we'll continue to have good-paying auto jobs, just like they do in every other country in the world. Every other country in the world protects their auto industry, whether it's Mexico, whether it's France, whether it's Italy. This government has an obligation to make sure that the plant in Oshawa, the plant in St. Catharines, the plants in Windsor and all over Ontario stay open.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'd like to be able to say that I'm pleased to rise in the House this afternoon—I'm always happy to be in the House but I can't say that I'm pleased to have to respond to the opposition members' motion. It puts forward a series of proposals seemingly designed to assist in getting a better budget for the people of Ontario, but most of the points actually have nothing to do with the budget that's going to be presented tomorrow, nor would they in any way assist us in this government's path to balancing the budget in 2017-18.

Now, the opposition does call on us to put forward a serious, credible, detailed plan to balance the budget by 2017-18, and we will do that. Minister Sousa will do that when he rises in the House tomorrow. This government is on track to reducing the deficit and achieving a balanced budget. We've met or exceeded all of our deficit projections over the last number of years, and prior to the global recession, this government was delivering surplus after surplus after surplus. This government knows how to do that, and we will again.

But the balance of the opposition motion really—I understand that their role is to question, to challenge, to criticize. And that's fair enough; that's their job. But a little less than a year ago there was an election in this province, and one of the ballot questions on that election was, "Do Ontarians want to have stable, predictable, good retirement income by way of an Ontario registered pension plan?" That was a valid question, Mr. Speaker, and the people of Ontario spoke clearly. So less than a year later, for the opposition to say, "Throw that out" really is not a credible position, I think, for them to even be putting forward.

If they have suggestions on how to do it better, fair enough; but as one of the members from the third party mentioned, the members of the official opposition know full well what it means not to have good pensions. They themselves eliminated a gold-plated pension plan, albeit for MPPs, but they replaced it with something that each and every one of them privately says is inadequate and they're not happy about. Really, they should be working with us, for the benefit of all Ontarians, to ensure that every Ontarian would be guaranteed good, decent retirement income.

Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have an ideological approach to this. They say everybody is on their own, everybody can take care of themselves. That's why we have over \$600 billion of unused RRSP contribution room in this country—over \$600 billion of savings that Canadians, some by choice, but most from necessity, could not achieve. Those people—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from James Bay and the member from Welland, could you keep it down a bit? Thanks.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Mr. Speaker, those people—not the wealthy 1% that most Conservative plans really speak to, but the majority of working Ontarians—will not be able to achieve that good level of retirement savings. That is why this is very important to bring forward.

I would have hoped that our friends across the aisle here would have spoken to their federal cousins and said, "Use that EI room, which was going to be created, to supplement the CPP." But of course, they chose not to.

I'm perplexed, because just a little over a week ago, we had a debate here about climate change, and today we're hearing, "Don't implement cap-and-trade carbon pricing"—which will be a North American-wide market in the coming years. "Don't do that. Don't do anything." Yet on March 12, the member from Simcoe—Grey said in this House, "We believe they should be taking measures to actually reduce greenhouse emissions." Well, what are they? On this side of the House, we have a plan. The PC environment critic from Huron—Bruce, also on March 12, said, "Climate change is too important of an issue and we cannot play games with it." Yet today, we have an opposition motion that simply says do nothing.

On the environment, it's also crucial that we act now. The federal government recently sent a letter to the province: "Please tell us what you're doing"—because they're doing nothing—"because we need that data to show that somebody is actually doing something in this country." So we're going to do that, of course.

Whether it's fixing home care—which they purport to want to do, but in fact, they wanted to cut 100,000 jobs. Many of those would have been front-line health care workers.

On the energy file, when they've made a mess of the hydro sector in this province, they have no plan to offer in exchange. We've done things to try to sustain that hydro system by making investments in the infrastructure, which they allowed to fall apart. That costs money, and that's part of a sound fiscal plan for this province.

On this side of the House, for those and many other reasons, we reject the opposition motion. It makes no sense, offers no advice on how to sustain a balanced budget, and we will not be voting for it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It is with recognition and respect for the public trust that I enter into today's debate. Our caucus has chosen to focus on five asks for this year's budget. We have chosen these topics as ones that we

believe will have a potentially devastating impact on all Ontarians, if implemented. They must be withdrawn. My remarks will be devoted to the proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

1640

From the introduction of this pension scheme, we have raised issues. First, the government hasn't provided a plan. Questions abound, but with no answers. Employers have told the government that the mandatory financial contributions will cost jobs, and we know that jobless people can't pay into or collect a pension. Employers and employees alike will have less money in their pockets, reducing their purchasing power now.

People want choice in their spending priorities and their saving methods. The ORPP robs Ontarians of that choice. It is clear to those who understand what's at stake that this pension scheme must be abandoned.

Instead, next week, we will have third reading of Bill 56, the ORPP bill, amid uncertainty. Let me explain. There is no clear definition of who is in or who is out of the plan. How many years will individuals be required to make contributions in order to receive benefits? For those who see this as an opportunity for a pension, there is also uncertainty—no idea how their money will be handled and how investment returns will be generated. We don't even know whether this ORPP is a Ponzi scheme, fraught with intergenerational inequity, whereby younger participants are paying for the older, soon-to-be-retired.

The lack of a plan has created further uncertainty, as there is no definition of "comparable" workplace pension plan. What will be the impact on existing private sector pensions? Hundreds of thousands of people employed in Ontario have workplace pension plans that, together, amount to trillions in assets.

In 12 hours of public hearings, we heard 41 speakers. It was clear that the majority who spoke were opposed for a number of reasons. One concern raised is that, without exemptions, the ORPP may crowd out or eliminate existing pension plans and retirement savings plans. For many people, this may mean that the ORPP provides no net increase to savings, or it may even reduce their retirement assets. Without a plan, it is impossible to evaluate; only speculate.

Another aspect is that the 1.9% contribution, provided by both the employee and the employer, is tax-exempt. Without a plan, we don't even know if the government has contemplated the impact on its revenues. How much is the government losing in tax revenue by this approach? We don't know about administration costs. How much will it cost to provide a stand-alone pension scheme: \$300 million, \$400 million? With no plan in place, it's back to speculation.

But there is a clue in last year's budget, on page 20 of the introduction: "By unlocking value from its assets and encouraging more Ontarians to save through a proposed new" pension plan, "new pools of capital would be available for Ontario-based projects such as building roads, bridges and new transit. Our strong alternative financing

and procurement model, run by Infrastructure Ontario, will allow for the efficient deployment of this capital...."

But this too leaves much open to uncertainty. "Efficient deployment of this capital" doesn't sound like a solid foundation for a pension plan; it sounds more like a building fund. There is a difference. With a properly tendered public-private partnership, infrastructure investment is carried by the private sector to build, and there is no evidence to illustrate the mechanism by which this process would provide the stream of income necessary for a pension.

My remarks today reflect the genuine concern that I and my caucus colleagues share about this proposal and its effect on the well-being of Ontarians. We know, through public discourse, businesses from around the province, and even the Ministry of Finance document, that this proposal is a job-killer.

Small businesses especially have been assaulted by this government by increased red tape and matching increased fees. They don't have any financial cushions to absorb this proposal. Instead, they see a government bent on squeezing more money from them through increased hydro rates, a mandatory pension contribution and a carbon tax, to name a few. Businesses can only pay these when they make a profit. More and more these days, businesses are unable to make a profit. They close their shop or move away.

I remind the Premier that the jobless rate has been the worst in this country for the last six years. The last thing Ontarians need is a plan to kill jobs.

Premier, unemployed people and people who will have to shutter their businesses are the people whose lives will be drastically affected by your pension scheme. We ask you to reconsider before it's too late. We ask you directly to withdraw your proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm pleased to stand in the House on behalf of the people of Kitchener-Waterloo, but also to talk about this upcoming budget. It has been said by many politicians from many other parties that budgets tell the story of our priorities, because when you follow the money, you follow the priorities of government. In this government you also have to follow where the people are going and who's getting appointed, but that's another story.

The motion that has been brought forward by the PC caucus has—I think we can come from a position of empathy with the PC caucus. I mean, they're frustrated. They're absolutely frustrated. We are as equally frustrated as the PC caucus with the Liberal government and their fiscal plans. But there are certainly a number of issues, actually, that need to be addressed, that this motion sort of skirts around.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker: I was just speaking to a candidate in the Alberta election. I reached out. We're doing some mentorship, province to province. There is a very exciting election, obviously, happening in Alberta

right now. I was speaking to Emily Shannon. She said that she is in a very Conservative riding, but people are listening. And boy, when people listen, good things happen. When they pay attention, good things happen.

She said, "I think they all agree that we all need to get to B from A"—so things need to be better around the economy, around the environment, around child care and health care—"but the difference is that we don't always agree on how to get to B." I think that this motion actually speaks volumes in that regard.

Mr. Wilson has moved this motion and he's looking for certain aspects to be engaged in this budget. I mean, there's no way on God's green earth that any of these motions are going to be reflected in this Liberal budget. Based on their participation and based on the looks across the aisle, I think we all know that those are not going to be contained there.

The good news, though, of course, is that the Liberals have given us lots to work against. There was this saying when I was on the school board: "An enraged electorate is an engaged electorate." I can tell you one thing: The Hydro One privatization is mobilizing people who have never been politically engaged. So congratulations, you've made the people of this province so angry that they're getting off the couch and they're going to get engaged in the political process. Some of them are even watching and tweeting about it and paying attention. We want them to be paying attention to your plan to sell off Hydro One, to burn the furniture to heat the house. I mean, it is as regressive as you get.

Mr. John Vanthof: Kathleen Wynne: Mike Harris, the sequel.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Not even Mike Harris and Ernie Eves—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife:—call on the government. It's an exciting day, budget day.

We had this sort of pseudo-lockup last Thursday for this banker's report. I don't understand it. I mean, you put the finance critic for the PCs and myself in a dark, dingy room with a little Liberal babysitter. The irony, of course, is that the lights didn't really work in the room; of course, we're selling off Hydro One, so it seemed a little foreshadowing to me. While we came out of that dark room, the hope genuinely is that this government will see the light on Hydro One privatization. It is not a plan that will be serving the people of this province right now, or future generations.

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The good news, though, is that there are solutions. I came into this Legislature during the minority government when people did have to listen to each other and there was some give and take, and at those committees there was a genuine effort to participate in a process that perhaps could make legislation stronger. Those days are no longer here. It is a different sort of reality here at Queen's Park. I must tell you, I'm not so happy about that, but here we are.

It's really interesting to watch the question period process—right, Mr. Speaker?—because on education, for instance—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Look who the Speaker is.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know. It's shocking to see the member from Simcoe in the Speaker's chair, although he looks very happy right now.

On the education front, there's no doubt about it: Last year's budget had 6% cuts in every ministry except for health, education, post-secondary training, community and social services, and justice, even though since then we've seen that it doesn't really matter. Those promises—it's not even worth the paper you printed it on, because you found backroom doorways to actually cut those things that you said you weren't going to cut. And 6%: That is an austerity budget, pure and simple, Mr. Speaker.

Tomorrow, we fully expect to see additional cuts, even more short-sighted perhaps than last year's. We should be learning through this process, because those cuts have been playing out in all of our communities across the province of Ontario, and yet, to see the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education get up and say, "Well, these cuts aren't happening"—there are people here today in this House who have actually lost their job.

Ms. Cindy Forster: "There are no nurses being laid off."

Ms. Catherine Fife: No. These are real people. These are real cuts. These are real jobs that have been reduced in communities from the north to the east to the west. There are obviously some politics at play here, but if you look at hospitals, the reductions are profound because this is the third year in a row that those budgets have been flat-lined, and that means a cut, a cut, a cut.

Even more alarming, Mr. Speaker, is that a huge amount of contracting out and privatizing of those services have compromised the quality of public services, but they have also cost us more. So when you look at the public accounts, for instance, which are actually the most accurate numbers that I can find in this place—as I've said, the budget was not altogether accurate—you can see that when you privatized the IT services, for instance, for public services, government services, there has been a 63% increase in cost and a reduction in service, and that does not serve the people of this province. That is not a fiscally responsible decision to take on.

So follow the money. See where the money is going, because it's not going to front-line services, and we've seen this. Bill 8 was supposed to improve transparency and accountability, and yet year after year after year we see these public sector CEO salaries continue to balloon. It is beyond insulting, the amount of money that people are getting in the public sector. I think we will have to have a debate in this Legislature at some point about what it means to actually serve the public, because university presidents should not be making a million dollars, Mr. Speaker. There is no justification. You cannot rationalize it. It should not be allowed through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. There

should be a hard cap. You have to have a hard cap on those salaries, because what's reasonable to a Liberal or what's reasonable to a Conservative most likely will not be reasonable to a New Democrat, because those numbers are too big. It speaks to the priorities, I think.

We would love to see an honest discussion about what is happening in the education file, because to see the Minister of Education get up and say, "These cuts are not happening, and we've invested these billions of dollars," you know what the important piece that's missing from the education discourse in this province is? The government can say they put some additional money in, but that went to new initiatives. Rozanski, back in 2002-03, identified \$2 billion which was removed by the PC caucus—this is, like, 14 years ago, 13 years ago. That money has never been replaced to the core funding of public education, because you directed the new funding to new initiatives. So you can't say that you've increased core funding. It went to your political interests. Now, on full-day kindergarten, that was also one of our interests, and I would never speak out against investing early in children. But the problem was that the Liberal government didn't follow their own advice, which Charles Pascal recommended, with our best future in mind, and that was to create community hubs. But you succumbed to the pressure that was out there around changing the status quo of what schools should be doing and what should happen in education, and you backed off that plan, which really was such a waste of energy. It just created more conflict between child care and education.

Now, it did in Ottawa, and in Waterloo, I'm very proud to say, we actually followed through on the initial report that Charles Pascal made, the recommendations he made to the government. At no cost to the taxpayer, because it's a not-for-profit model and because there's a wraparound model of care, we created almost 2,000 child care spaces in Waterloo region at no cost to the taxpayer. That's the kind of creative, innovative idea that this government should be pursuing, not selling off a public asset at \$4 billion. There is a \$100-billion backlog on the infrastructure file in this province alone. You guys drop \$4 billion on the way to work. It's absolutely ridiculous.

What we're looking for is really progressive ideas around where the money is going and where people in this province are going to get for investment.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I can see that the Liberals are very amused by my comments. But right now they're really focused on beer. They want you to look at beer. They want you to get focused on six-packs; maybe a couple of 12-packs in 10 stores. But the real story in this province right now is how desperate this government is for revenue. They're desperate because of their own mismanagement. They created this crisis, just like the former education minister, Mr. Snobelen. Do you remember: "We're going to create a crisis in education." This government has created a crisis in the economy of this province and in the fiscal management of this province, and

now they have created a reason to finally succumb to Bay Street.

Ms. Cindy Forster: That's how you got elected.

Ms. Catherine Fife: They did create a crisis. Remember Bill 115? Some of you—I know the back row weren't here. I don't think some of the back row people were here. But yes, there was a seat. It was between a minority and a majority government, and the government wanted to look like they knew what they were doing on the financial side of the books. Then they created this one seat, and you know what? Then they brought in Bill 115. Ironically, they brought in Bill 115, they squashed collective bargaining rights, they joined with the PC caucus, and people were enraged. This was never supposed to happen; this was not a progressive move.

Then they brought in Bill 122, you'll remember, Mr. Speaker. Bill 122 was a piece of legislation to say, essentially, that you're never going to be that mean to the education sector again. There's a little loophole in there, actually, that the minister can override at her discretion. I suspect that loophole to be pulled out pretty soon, I would think, because there are seven boards at the secondary school level in this province and they do not find 38 students in their classes to be acceptable on any level. As I have already pointed out, the additional funding went to new initiatives that the Liberals brought in. This funding never went to the gap in funding that Rozanski originally identified, which was \$2 billion. It just didn't. That's what I have to say about education.

Ms. Cindy Forster: What about the OPP?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm going to get to that.

Of course, if you talk about the economy, you cannot talk about the economy without addressing the energy issue in this province, and that the Ontario Energy Board has been sort of lifted up as this, "Don't worry. The OEB is going to take care of rates."

I watched the scrum with Mr. Clark, and he was very clear when he was asked, "Are rates going to go up?" "We don't think so." That instills a lot of confidence: "We don't think so." The Premier said as well, "We hope not. We hope that it doesn't go up." You can't blame Ontarians for having very serious trust issues with this government, given the track record.

Anyway, the 15% increase, and then the government has said, "It's going to be the OEB. They're going to have control—they always have—of these rates, and we're going to strengthen the OEB." But if you go back to what the Auditor General said about the Ontario Energy Board, it's a scathing report about the OEB and how many issues are at this board. They say that the cost of service review did not take into account all information and practices that could affect consumer rates—red flag. Then she goes on to say the settlement proposals are not reviewed from a public interest perspective, i.e., gas plants. She says that rate designs could disadvantage some customers, those who live in poverty—

1700

Ms. Cindy Forster: Or in the north.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —or in the north, or the east, or the west.

There's an additional review needed for accuracy and validity of information submitted to the board.

Improvements are needed in addressing consumer complaints. The Ombudsman also raised this. Of course, the Ombudsman is not going to have oversight over the new hydro. It's a very sought-after job. Of course, everybody is looking for a job in Ontario these days. They want that beer ombudsman job. It's definitely a highly sought-after job. It was all over Twitter, actually, when that first story broke out. The Ombudsman is not going to have oversight over this important file around energy.

Then we have this transit issue. The Conservatives are calling for a serious, credible and detailed plan to balance the budget by 2017-18. Well, there are so many knowledgeable stakeholders—chambers of commerce, municipalities, Better Business Bureaus, universities. They've come together in Kitchener-Waterloo, my community, and they've gathered the research and the evidence to make the case for two-way, all-day GO to Kitchener-Waterloo. This promise is like Groundhog Day. Just before the election, the Minister of Transportation and the Premier went all the way around Waterloo region and promised two-way, all-day, 30-minute service. The former Minister of Transportation even offered us a bullet train. I love that. I love that he said, "We can get a bullet train going along the Windsor-Toronto corridor for \$500 million." I guess some people bought it. But on Friday, when they made their last announcement, of course, Waterloo region was left out of that equation. The whole idea of two-way, all-day means that people from Toronto can also get to Kitchener-Waterloo. So now we're waiting 10 years—a 10-year wait on top of a five-year wait makes us a priority community. Do you know what? I just hope that the people of Kitchener-Waterloo don't buy what you're selling next time around. I'll be here to remind them about the broken promises. It's disgraceful for a Minister of Transportation to stand up and say to the community that generates hundreds of millions of dollars—that's the key piece. That's the economic development piece. In Kitchener-Waterloo, amazing things are happening: the commercialization of research, the innovation, the research, the advanced manufacturing. Google is there, and Desire2Learn. Good things are happening in Kitchener-Waterloo, but people need to get there, and they also need to get home, and they live here in Toronto. The municipalities of Kitchener and Waterloo made a proposal. It was delivered to the cabinet. The cabinet said, "This is amazing. This is worthwhile investing in." That was before the election. On Friday, we found out that we're now a priority by waiting an additional 10 years.

We're obviously concerned about transit. As the Auditor General points out, the more we delay these decisions and investments—the longer that the economic investment will pay off. Then, because the government is not generating that revenue, which they're so desperate for, they, in turn, will not have the money to invest in

education and health care. Those are the core values which people in this province have said they really value.

So what we're going to be looking at in this budget—the public-private partnerships. You can't ignore the AG's report altogether; you can't just dismiss it out of hand. Even if you don't take the \$8.2 billion, the \$6.5 billion in financing and legal and consulting costs that were above and beyond what a traditional procurement process—you can't ignore that. Governments can borrow money as low as 3%. It's not like you can leave the province, because you're the government. They know that you're not going to skip town. Although, I'm sure some people, on some days, may want to.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, look at the OPP. Ask them.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Some people have. Some people have skipped town.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, Dalton got out of here pretty quickly.

You have to have a second look at that. You have to take a second look at the way infrastructure is procured in this province, because it is not sustainable. The Auditor General brought this report. It should not be dismissed out of hand.

What we're going to be looking for is some changes to infrastructure funding. We want the corporate tax giveaways rolled back. We want you to put people first. We want you to prioritize them first. We want you to close the HST loopholes. This is a huge revenue for this province, and it's going to be a lost opportunity. We'll be looking for these significant changes in this budget process. We're wondering where the budget line will be for the four OPP investigations, because you can't tell me—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It's got to be more than that by now.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, there are only four. It is historic.

There is a cost, though, to scandal and there is a cost to waste. The people of this province are bearing the brunt of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to join the debate today on the PC Party's opposition day motion, specifically regarding carbon tax. Last March, I requested that this Liberal government not adopt a carbon tax. The announcement of the cap-and-trade program does not change this. It's just a tax by a different name.

Last Monday, when this cap-and-trade scheme was announced, even the Premier admitted it would be a tax. This tax will increase the cost of living and raising a family. It will also increase the cost of doing business here in Ontario. It is an irresponsible tax that Ontarians cannot afford.

This tax was introduced for no other reason but to fund a cash-strapped, mismanaged Liberal government on the backs of Ontarians, and it's unacceptable. Ontario already is in a dire economic state. This government has a nearly \$11-billion deficit that has increased for a third

straight year, up from \$10.5 billion last year to \$10.9 billion. By 2017-18, Ontario's net debt will have reached \$325 billion, nearly \$23,000 for every Ontarian.

Instead of taking responsible steps to balance their budget, the Liberals are instead trying to find new sources of revenue, which means taxing Ontarians in any possible way. This budget is all about gouging Ontarians. Cap-and-trade, the sale of Hydro One, changes to how beer is sold, ORPP, these are all initiatives that have one thing in common: an increase in costs for Ontarians. Again, I repeat: Ontario families and businesses simply cannot afford another tax to fund Liberal mismanagement.

Now, let's talk about the carbon tax, the cap-and-trade scheme that they've talked about. According to Stats Canada, Ontario has only contributed half a percentage point towards global greenhouse gas emissions, making Ontario very much a marginal producer of carbon emissions compared to many developing states around the world. The result of a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade, whether it decreases emissions or not, will undoubtedly be rising costs to consumers across the marketplace. The costs of heating or cooling a home will increase, while companies in energy-intensive fields will have increased costs that will be passed on to consumers, or they may very well just choose to leave Ontario, causing consumers to lose their jobs.

We already pay some of the highest energy rates in North America. We saw, just this week, that hydro rates will be going up yet again under this Liberal government by 14%. A further increase, by the way of a tax on carbon, may drive families into a heat-or-eat scenario. This Liberal cap-and-trade or pay-to-pollute scheme isn't a plan to reduce emissions, but rather it's a plan to take money from taxpayers to fund government initiatives.

Speaker, I've said it before and I'll say it again: Based on history, I have absolutely zero trust that this government can implement this type of system properly. It'll be just like the health tax implemented previously. It's called a health tax, but this revenue doesn't even go into the health sector. Instead, the health tax, one of the largest tax hikes in Ontario history, goes into general revenue—general revenue that is the Liberals' slush fund to pay for their billion-dollar scandals, such as gas plants and eHealth. The list can go on. All the while, front-line health care continues to be cut.

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I was speaking with OPSEU representatives today and I heard that the equipment is there to do a lot of procedures, but in many cases, they cut the procedure because the hospitals can't afford the man-hours to run the equipment. I share that with you because last Monday, a week ago this past Monday, my sister-in-law broke her leg below the knee in two places. She is only being operated on today to get a rod inserted. It's absolutely abysmal what this Liberal government has done to our health care.

You know what? I would dare reflect on a comment made by the former Premier and also the former energy minister, when they professed that the gas plant cancella-

tion would cost a mere \$40 million. Sadly, we learned that they misled us when the figure was actually \$1.1 billion. As I said before, I do not trust this government to get it right.

Even if gas increases by three cents, like the government claims it will, that will cost Ontarians another \$700 million a year. That's an additional \$100 per driver per year on top of everything else. It's not just gas that will increase, but groceries, clothing and heating. As I said before, this is a tax on everything.

It's not the first time that the Liberals have copied a European energy plan before they saw the evidence. The Liberal Green Energy Act was going to save the environment, reduce pollution and create jobs. Instead, it caused energy prices to skyrocket, devastated communities, made Liberal friends rich and drove jobs out of this province. The Green Energy Act is a disaster, and this cap-and-trade tax is setting up to be the Green Energy Act 2.0. However, this time, it won't be just electricity rates that soar, because now, as I mentioned before, sadly, their cap-and-trade scheme will be a tax on everything.

The Green Energy Act cost each household \$1,100 a year over and above what they were already paying. That's \$1,100 that could have gone towards saving for a home or for retirement. That is \$1,100 from taxpayers' pockets, and it's about to get worse.

Let's be clear here. I care about the environment, and the PC Party of Ontario cares about the environment. I would be remiss if I didn't mention today, Earth Day, which is a very important day across the world, that it was the PC Party of Ontario that invented the Ministry of the Environment. We were the party to shut down the first coal plant in Ontario, thanks to Environment Minister Elizabeth Witmer. The PC Party of Ontario created wetlands, stood for conservation, and we are truly the original environmental party here in Ontario. I just wish the other side of the House would acknowledge that.

That is why I find it shameful that this government is planning to implement the cap-and-trade system or, as we call it on this side, pay-to-pollute. I call it that because emitters will still pollute, but they'll just pay to do more of it. It is not helping or improving the environment; rather, it's just increasing the cost of doing business, which in turn raises the cost of living here in Ontario.

We have seen this system in place in other jurisdictions around the world, and what we have ultimately found is that it's been plagued with fraud and mismanagement. It is a system that allows government to choose winners and losers—so really, when you think about it, it should not come as a surprise that this system is best fitted for this particular Liberal government.

Instead of taxing all Ontarians, there are a number of other options that we could take a look at to deal with climate change without hurting businesses and families. We can take a closer look at the role of conservation, expanding forests, green spaces and wetlands. These are all natural and cost-effective solutions. We can also look at the role of innovation. We all know that the private sector

drives innovation as long as the government stays out of its way and does not further burden them with red tape.

There's so much more I could go on about, Speaker, but at the end of the day, I would like to remind everyone that what we are asking for here today, by way of our PC opposition day motion, is a sensible solution that the PC Party knows will address the dire economic state of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a pleasure to rise today to add my comments to the member for Simcoe-Grey's motion. It's actually a pleasure to rise today because we're finally going to be discussing fiscal responsibility in this House instead of the usual lip service that the government pays to responsibility in question period.

As I only have a few minutes today, I'd just like to highlight a couple of components of the motion that are of particular importance to the great riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex. We're calling on the government to make a commitment to reduce energy prices so that all people and businesses no longer have to be paying some of the highest energy costs in all of North America.

Yesterday I took a look at the Ontario Energy Board's graph of historical energy prices. The upcoming May 1 spike to energy costs was so massive that the on-peak energy cost didn't even fit on the OEB's graph. The Liberals have literally sent energy prices through the roof. Since then, they've added a bit of height to the graph so that the skyrocketing prices actually fit, but since October 2011, hydro prices in the province of Ontario have actually increased 49.1%. All of that is on the backs of hard-working Ontarians.

The graph that I was just referring to only goes back to 2006, but the latest hike is the biggest increase in energy costs in nearly a decade, and it's only going to get worse from here as the Liberals move forward with their incredibly dangerous and extreme plan to sell off Hydro One for pennies on the dollar in order to pay for projects that a real government would be able to cost without selling off key assets.

According to the Liberals' long-term energy plan, which was revamped in 2013, hydro prices will rise even more by 2018. Who knows how much further these prices will rise with the Liberals' plan to pawn off Hydro One?

This is an absolute disgrace. I know that the members opposite didn't campaign on this, and I wonder just how they feel about such a radical and dangerous plan. I wonder how many members sitting on government benches have ever had to fear the day that their hydro bill arrives in the mail. It's an awful feeling. And I wonder if any of those members have ever had to make the choice between keeping the lights on and putting food on the table. I know for a fact that the great people in the town of Ridgeway, no less, are fearing that whenever their hydro bill comes in. I cannot believe just how high their hydro prices are. Thank you to this government.

I also don't believe and don't know, really, how the members on that side of the House can, in fact, support a plan that will take so much money out of the pockets of their constituents and local businesses. In the case of small businesses, many people are going to be forced to choose between keeping staff or keeping the lights on.

The last part of this motion actually calls on the government to have a serious, credible and detailed plan to balance the budget by 2017-18. Now, I said a credible plan. If they can do that, that will, in fact, be incredible. This is in contrast to the government's ridiculous, unbelievable and detail-free sham of a plan to balance the budget by 2017-18.

Balancing the budget is a difficult task and it requires years of hard work and thoughtful planning. We look to Ottawa. They took the time to chip away at their deficit until they were able to present a balanced budget. It took a lot of steps to get there.

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Stop the partisanship, government. It's fact.

Ontario can also learn a thing or two about responsible spending from Quebec. They actually managed to present a budget that contains no new taxes and balanced the budget. In Ontario, you get several tax hikes and an unbalanced budget. It's the worst of both worlds. Falling behind Quebec, Ontario's government is sinking quickly in quicksand. Perhaps they think that the budget will just balance itself. I heard that from, I think, a federal Liberal leader at one point in time.

As I said, it takes many steps to get a balanced budget. The first step is admitting that you have an addiction, a spending problem. This government is simply addicted to spending. As soon as they get some spending money in their hands, they don't use it to pay down the crippling debt or help ease the increasing—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, folks. I've been extremely lenient. There's been a lot of yelling. Please don't make me go into action. It's getting close. Cut it down. And not so loud, please.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. I was just trying to talk overtop of those nerve-ending voices I was hearing from the government side.

Let me reiterate. As soon as they get some spending money in their hands, they don't use it to pay down crippling debt or help ease the increasing financial burden that their government is placing on Ontarians. No, no, no. They simply run to the next pet project which is almost over-budget and delayed.

My constituents are simply tired of paying for Liberal mistakes, and when mistakes keep piling up, taxes get hiked, too. Taxes keep getting raised every which way you look, yet there is no indication that this government will be able to balance a budget, let alone within a couple of years.

The Auditor General warned the Liberals in her last report that failing to address the deficit will result in crowding out essential services like health care and edu-

cation. We've seen nurses being let go across the province, schools on the verge of closing and, in my riding, we could be on the verge of losing the Leamington District Memorial Hospital's obstetrics unit.

I've met with the Minister of Health, the Erie St. Clair LHIN, LDMH, concerned citizens of my riding and neighbouring areas and I presented petitions asking the government to keep the OB unit open. This clinic means too much to the people of my riding as well as neighbouring ridings, whose members are also mad about the potential closure, to scrap it just so that the government can fund yet another pet project somewhere else in the province.

The Liberals are planning on rewriting the law to use money raised from pawning off Hydro One to pay for unknown infrastructure projects, which they say will cut commute times in the GTA. Yet at the same time, they're happy to force delivering mothers in Leamington to commute for nearly an hour to give birth—totally absurd. This is a real double standard and a slap in the face to the people in my community and throughout rural Ontario.

The government is raising taxes—strike one. The government is failing to address the debt—strike two. And even with more taxes and debt, they're still cutting services—strike three. In my world of umpiring, you're out. And by 2018, this government will be out.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Davenport is trying to shout out me. Further debate? All right. That was the last call.

Mr. Wilson has moved opposition day number 3. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1723 to 1733.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Order. Members, take your seats.

Mr. Wilson has moved opposition day number 3. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Clark, Steve
Dunlop, Garfield
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim

Jones, Sylvia
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
Martow, Gila
McDonnell, Jim
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
Nicholls, Rick
Pettapiece, Randy

Scott, Laurie
Smith, Todd
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura
Anderson, Granville
Armstrong, Teresa J.
Baker, Yvan
Balkissoon, Bas
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Colle, Mike
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dong, Han
Fife, Catherine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Forster, Cindy
Fraser, John

French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne
Gélinas, France
Gravelle, Michael
Gretzky, Lisa
Hoggarth, Ann
Hoskins, Eric
Hunter, Mitzie
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Sophie
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted

Meilleur, Madeleine
Milczyn, Peter Z.
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sattler, Peggy
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Thibeault, Glenn
Vanthof, John
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 25; the nays are 62.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There being no further business, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1736.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	
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Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
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Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
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Laurie Scott, Daiene Vernile
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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
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Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 23 April 2015

Jeudi 23 avril 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 23 April 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 23 avril 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Orders of the day. Orders of the day. Orders of the day. Last call for orders of the day.

There being no orders of the day, this House is recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 0903 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Today page captain Joshua Rosenberg is joined by his family: his mother, Dr. Marsh Rosenberg; his father, David Rosenberg; and sister Eliana Rosenberg.

I would also like to introduce a constituent of mine, Amy Rechtsman, who is in the Legislature today. Amy is here visiting with the Yes I Can Nursery School. They have two locations in North York serving 100 children, many of whom have autism.

Mrs. Gila Martow: A friend of mine, Randy Maxwell, is going to be coming down from Richmond Hill today at 12 o'clock. Join Randy and me and the Israeli Consul, D.J. Schneeweiss, for the flag raising on Israel Independence Day. Am Yisroel Chai.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It's a great pleasure of mine to introduce a group of people from the National Junior Golf Academy: Mr. Kingsley Rowe and his wife, Amelia Yee, Terry Kirkup, John Dickie and my very good friend Kim Kirkup, who is also associated with TK Golf Enterprises. She was also the volunteer coordinator for my first election in 2011—a dear, dear friend. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It's my pleasure to introduce the page captain today from my riding Samantha Lin. She is here with family members, who are in the public gallery: her aunt Lisa Ma, her grandmother Shu Yun Li and her grandfather Jin Hua Ma.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'm very glad to welcome my dear sister Susan, who is here today, accompanied by her beloved husband, Roy—Susan and Roy Houghton.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Speaker, please help me welcome the mother of page Megan Chan. Rebecca Yu will be joining us shortly from the great riding of Oak Ridges–Markham.

Hon. David Zimmer: I have the pleasure of introducing two of my constituents who are here as a part of

the Yes I Can Nursery School visit: Karen Lam and Michelle Chin. There they are. Welcome.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I also want to introduce several of my constituents from St. Paul's here today: Vicki Mason, a Yes I Can Nursery School board member, is here, along with Rebecca Hall and Monique Saunders, parents from Yes I Can Nursery School. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I have a number of visitors here in the Legislature this morning, a very busy day for Davenport. With us, we have Mr. McLaughlin's grade 5 students from Alexander Muir/Gladstone public school.

We are also welcoming a Portuguese folklore group from Les Ulis et Orsay, France, who are being welcomed to Davenport by community organization Casa das Beiras.

Also here for the celebration of the Carnation Revolution this Saturday, April 25, is Colonel Manuel Pedrosa Marques. Welcome all to Queen's Park.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's my pleasure to introduce Ashley Allinson, board president of Yes I Can Nursery School in Beaches–East York and also the editor of the Toronto Food Blog. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a special group of guests in the Speaker's gallery on my left-hand side. I'm going to turn to the Attorney General to do the introduction.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci, monsieur le Président. Earlier this morning I had the great pleasure of honouring Ontarians who have shown exceptional commitment to helping victims of crime and their families. This year's recipients are true role models for all people in Ontario.

Ces récipiendaires des Prix de distinction du procureur général pour les services aux victimes proviennent de partout en Ontario. From Sault Ste. Marie, please welcome Robin Kerr, Staff Sergeant Michael Davey and Richard Gadde; from Brockville, Sonya Jodoin; from Sarnia, Lenore Lukasic-Foss; from Smiths Falls, Mary Pat Bingley; from Brampton, LaRee Walters-Boadway; from Richmond Hill, Cathy Danton; from Peterborough, Lindsay Haacke, representing Francesca Pisano; from here in Toronto, we have Michele Anderson, Barb McIntyre, Reverend Sky Starr, Sunder Singh, representing the Elspeth Heyworth, and Celia Chu, representing Anna Amy Ho; and from Hamilton, John Stanley and Jennifer Fazzari. Although not present, I would also like to acknowledge Pamela Cross from Kingston.

Félicitations et merci.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'd like to welcome students and teachers from the Jones Avenue English-as-a-second-language class today. Enjoy the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In the west public gallery, visiting us here today, is Zanana Akande, the member from St. Andrew—St. Patrick in the 35th Parliament. Welcome. We're glad you're here with us today.

Also we have in the Speaker's gallery today special guests from a parliamentary delegation led by His Excellency Fazal Hadi Muslimyar, the Speaker of the House of Elders—or Senate—of the National Assembly of Afghanistan. We welcome you here.

Government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. In light of the attendance of our guests from the Afghanistan Upper House of Parliament, I would like to seek unanimous consent on behalf of all members of this House to observe a moment of silence for our fallen Canadian soldiers who worked shoulder to shoulder with men and women in Afghanistan to bring peace and prosperity to that country.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent for all of us to observe a moment of silence in honour of the Canadian soldiers, along with the Afghanis. Do we agree? Agreed.

I would ask all members to please rise and observe a moment of silence in respect.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): May they rest in peace.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier. Premier, during this pre-budget period we have tried to impress upon you how reckless and dangerous your fiscal and electricity policies really are. Sadly, it seems we're not getting through.

1040

I know you have enough staff so that every call and every email to your office is screened by a legion of loyal Liberals. Here in the opposition, we often deal with those on a personal basis. We hear from constituents in desperate circumstances because their hydro bills are skyrocketing while their incomes are stagnant and the tax burden grows heavier. But this does not seem to matter to you. Ratepayers in this province currently don't know how they're going to pay this month's hydro bill. Where will they be in five years when their bills have doubled under your failed disastrous energy policies?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member opposite for the question. I would say to him that he knows full well that we have worked very hard to reinvest in and rebuild the energy system in this province. The electricity

system had been neglected when we came into office. It was degraded across the province, it was not reliable and we had to make investments. Just as an example, 10,000 kilometres of line had to be rebuilt.

The fact is that that costs money. The legacy of the party opposite was that they had left that degraded electricity system. We've made those investments, and we recognize that we have to have some supports in place for people who need some help. So I hope that, as the member opposite responds to those emails, he lets people know about the programs that are in place. I'll speak to those in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yet she conveniently ignores the \$50 billion of global adjustment that people are paying in this province.

You keep ignoring the \$27-billion debt of the Ontario Electricity Financial Corp. like it doesn't actually exist. Your ignorance-is-bliss mentality won't make the problem go away.

Energy rates have continuously increased since your government came to power in 2003. This devastating trend of escalating rates will only worsen through your sale of Hydro One. If you sell 60% of Hydro One, you will restrict the OEFC's ability to pay off the electricity debt. This will result in higher rates for electricity consumers—even higher than your 42% planned increase under your long-term energy plan.

Premier, I ask you this question: Are you going to follow the law in the Electricity Act and use the proceeds from the Hydro One sale to pay down the electricity debt?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the supplementary has gotten to where this member really wants to go, which is that he doesn't believe we should be taking the tough decisions required to invest in infrastructure in this province. That's essentially what he is saying.

Let me go back to the issue of people who need some support. He knows full well that no matter what we do in terms of Hydro One, the Ontario Energy Board will continue to set rates. The Ontario Energy Board has been setting rates; they will continue to set rates. But even in that reality, we know that there are people who need support.

For example, the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program provides emergency financial support for families and individuals who are having trouble paying their bills. The saveONenergy Home Assistance Program helps consumers save on energy costs by improving energy efficiency in their homes. The fact is that we recognize supports are necessary, and we have programs in place. But we are going to invest in infrastructure, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Those programs are nothing but distractions to take people's attention away from the disasters you've put upon them.

Your rushed announcement to sell Hydro One shows you have no plan to protect ratepayers from further increases. You're motivated by the short-term goal to fund

your wish list and, in turn, have no problem making things worse for electricity consumers, even though they've been hammered since you came to power.

You're ignoring the elephant in the room. As rates rise in Ontario and become more and more uncompetitive, you've driven businesses out of the province into the arms of lower-rate jurisdictions and have made electricity unaffordable for the average Ontarian. It's the ratepayers of this province who have built up energy assets like Hydro One over the decades, and they are the ones who need the break today. But you seem determined to double down on your disastrous policies.

How much more do the ratepayers of this province have to suffer before you provide real, sustainable energy relief to consumers?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You know, the elephant that was in the room when that party was in power was that there needed to be investment in this province—there needed to be investment in the electricity system; there needed to be investment in infrastructure—none of which the opposite—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Some of the noise I'm hearing is coming from people who are supposed to be seated elsewhere.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —none of which the party opposite undertook, Mr. Speaker. We are undertaking those investments.

Let me continue to make sure that the member opposite understands the programs that are in place because, if his concern is for people who are struggling, he will want to know about these. As he knows, currently the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit, which is a 10% discount for residential consumers and small businesses and farms, is in place. What I hope he's aware of is that the new Ontario Electricity Support Program will come into effect when the OCEB expires, and that provides targeted support for low-income families. I hope he's aware of that and he lets his constituents know.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I beg for your indulgence because I've just been handed a note. There's another guest that has been inadvertently missed, Louise Russo, in the Speaker's gallery, who was shot and who recovered from a violent crime. We welcome you to the House today.

I apologize to the members; I thought it was important. We now have a new question.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Yes, the delay I think was necessary. That was important.

My question is to the Premier. On April 20, regarding power rates, you said, "The way that rates are set by the OEB: That's how they're set now" and that's how we will set them in the future. "Those protections are in place." Yet on that same day, the OEB announced a 15%

increase, and now consumers will be paying twice as much on-peak. My definition and the Premier's definition of "consumer protection" are miles apart. In fact, she hasn't sold—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, she's asking the question.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —a single share of Hydro One yet, but prices are going up, making it more difficult for Ontario families. Will the Premier tell this assembly right now what her sale of Hydro One—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please finish.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Will the Premier tell us right now what her sale of Hydro One will cost Ontario ratepayers, what it will cost Ontario families and what it will cost Ontario seniors?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite made one of the points I want to make, Mr. Speaker, which is: These are unrelated subjects. The fact is that the Ontario Energy Board has set rates. We laid out a long-term energy plan, and in that we forecast what the rates were going to be. The current—

Mr. John Yakabuski: You tell that to the person who can't pay their hydro bill, that they're unrelated subjects.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It goes both ways.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The current rates just announced by the OEB are actually lower than what was forecast in the long-term energy plan. The fact is that we are working very hard to take costs out of the system so that those prices can go down.

The member opposite references the off-peak and on-peak prices. Yes, we want to drive conservation. I know that the party opposite has not the slightest bit of interest in conservation or environmental concerns. They have no interest in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. None of that is of interest to them. The fact is, it is of interest to us, and having a decent gap between off-peak and on-peak actually drives conservation.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order. I'm catching up. And the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, second time.

Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, that answer wasn't even rational, and the Premier knows it, because they changed their long-term energy program and their plan several times in the last five years. In fact, the sale of Hydro One wasn't even in it. In fact, it wasn't even in their platform.

Electricity rates have tripled three times since her government has come to power in 2003, the OEB continues to raise its rates and they're going to continue to drive up rates because we have to pay for expensive energy experiments by this government, whether it's industrial wind turbines or whether it is the smart meter tax machines.

Now we are going to see Ontario families struggle even further off-peak. Why, at a time when Stephen Harper's government is making it easier for Ontario families to survive, is this government making it more difficult—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: There's an open nomination in Ottawa there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Eglinton—Lawrence will come to order.

Start the clock. Premier.

1050

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would just note that the member opposite couldn't even keep a straight face when—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke will come to order. The next one's a warning.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would just say that even the member opposite couldn't keep a straight face when she was asking that question.

The fact is that the federal government has made decisions. They've made decisions for their political reasons. They've made decisions that, if you're doing fine, if you're wealthy, then we're going to help you do better—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: But what they didn't do was tackle the tough issues that are facing every province in this country. They didn't tackle the infrastructure deficit, they didn't tackle the fiscal imbalance. They didn't look at the communities in this country and say, "We're going to work with you to make sure that you have an economic future and we're going to support you in that economic development." They didn't do any of that. They just said, "If you're rich, we're going to help you get richer."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not sure who said that, but I would appreciate immensely if the member would stand up and withdraw.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I withdraw, Speaker.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm not surprised.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not asking for editorials either.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is hard to keep a straight face around here given the embarrassment we're going to see at 4 o'clock this afternoon with a budget that is still in deficit, when the federal government can balance their own.

But let's get back to the point here: The Premier said this week that hydro rates won't go up, but Ed Clark—

Interjections.

Hon. David Oraziotti: Try standing up for Ontario for a change.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Government and Consumer Services, come to order.

Carry on.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Ed Clark said he can't guarantee that hydro rates won't go up. As our old friend in this chamber Dalton McGuinty once said, "The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour." So I think we're in for a doozy of a hydro rate increase.

Again, rates have tripled since you've come to power. They're going to spike another 42%, going up \$100 per family in households across this province. Just this week, it was announced electricity rates are rising again by another 15% in May.

Will the Premier come clean and tell us how much her sale of Hydro One is going to cost Ontario families who are struggling under her government?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The budget that we are going to bring forward is going to be a responsible one that is based on a plan that we ran on and that we are committed to, and that is investment in this province. It did include a review of assets. We said we were going to do that. We have done that in order that we can invest in the public transit and the roads and the bridges that are needed all across this province.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Dufferin—Caledon.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When the party opposite was in power, they had an opportunity to tackle many of these big issues. They chose not to. They neglected the electricity system.

Yes, they worked toward balancing their budget, and the way they did that was very similar to what Mr. Harper has done. They balanced their budgets on the backs of municipalities. They downloaded costs to the municipalities. We've uploaded those costs. We're not going to balance our budget on the backs of municipalities or residents, but that's exactly what Stephen Harper has done.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Last April, the Premier made a promise to Ontarians: She said she would not cut education. Well, we've seen teachers fired, schools closed and families thrown into chaos.

In fact, just last week, Windsor families learned that 21 early childhood educators were being fired. People didn't vote to see their schools closed and teachers fired.

Will today's budget reverse these cuts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Education is going to want to speak to the specifics, but let's just be clear: The funding for education has not been cut. It will not be cut.

In fact, if the member opposite had an opportunity to look at the Grants for Student Needs, which is actually the section of the budget that applies to education—those numbers are already in the public realm—he would see that, despite the fact that there are fewer students in our education system, the funding has remained stable, which means that there is more money per student in the system this year than last year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Premier made another promise: She said she would not cut health care. Yet I would ask the Premier to tell that to the 17 RNs who were fired from Southlake Regional Health Centre, the 50 nurses fired in Ottawa, the 11 nurses who are being fired in Thunder Bay and the seniors who are losing 28 beds in that region.

Ontarians didn't vote to see nurses fired or hospitals closed. Will today's budget reverse those cuts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite and that whole caucus know that the truth is that there are 24,000 more nurses employed in this province than there were a decade ago. We continue to employ nurses and other health care professionals.

My critic the member from Nickel Belt scared the heck out of a lot of people yesterday when she said the Lakeridge Health centre was letting go of 20% of their genetic technologists and laying off senior technologists. These positions, she said, have a direct impact on the patients at Durham.

In fact, the truth is the complete opposite of what she said. The hospital in question was so irritated by her response in the Legislature yesterday that they're issuing a letter today to correct the record. She's talking, first of all—

Interjections.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I hope I have the opportunity in the supplementary to address this more specifically.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Ontario drivers pay the highest—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like order, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Ontario drivers pay the highest auto insurance rates in Canada. The Premier told Ontarians

that they would see a 15% reduction in auto insurance by this August, but with four months to go, the Premier is not even halfway there.

The Premier promised not to cut health care, but we have seen nurses being fired and hospitals being closed. The Premier promised not to cut education, but we've seen teachers being fired and schools being closed. The Premier promised to reduce auto insurance by 15%, yet we've not seen that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the member from Newmarket–Aurora, and I've probably got four more that I'm going to get to: That's enough.

Please finish.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Premier promised to provide a 15% reduction to auto insurance. Will today's budget ensure that Ontarians get the reduction that they were promised?

1100

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm prepared to go through this one hospital at a time, if they want to. I'm going to give the member the opportunity as well to correct his record when he said that we're closing hospitals. There is not a single hospital that's closing around this province unless we're building a new one to replace it.

Back to Lakeridge hospital: She was talking about three people. The hospital has said that they disagree that patients will be impacted. In fact, they said that technology has changed. They now use the University Health Network lab for better tests, faster results and better quality. All three still have jobs—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): From your own side, I want to hear the answer, and from this side, the member from Dufferin–Caledon will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs is warned. The injections are not appreciated—

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for the correction—very helpful.

New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the Premier: Many Ontarians are still trying to remember when they voted to sell off Hydro One. The Premier made lots of promises during the last election. She promised 15-minute all-day GO rail service to Kitchener. She broke that promise last Friday. But she never said anything about selling off Ontario's oldest and most valuable public asset. She never made that promise; that was an election promise from the Common Sense Revolution. We're lucky that the Ontario public forced Mike Harris to break that promise.

Why is the Premier breaking her promise to run a progressive government while keeping an election promise from the Common Sense Revolution?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Making decisions like the investment in transit and transportation infrastructure to the magnitude that we are—these are very important decisions, because they are decisions that are going to have an impact for generations to come.

The member opposite knows full well that we are committed to 15-minute full-day, two-way GO service. She also knows that there are sections of line around the province—and I know the Minister of Transportation will want to speak to this—where we have to negotiate with CN and CP, and we have to make sure that we can move forward.

The fact is we did run on reviewing assets. We said that part of our plan to invest in the infrastructure, the roads and the bridges that are needed around this province, would be to look at assets that have been built up by this province and owned by the people of Ontario, and we would leverage those—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: You actually used the words “sell Ontario Hydro” —

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin—Caledon is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —leverage those in order to invest in new assets, and we would retain ownership, which is exactly what we're doing. We're retaining ownership of Hydro One, broadening that ownership, but we will make sure that we make those investments that we committed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Premier: Over the last few years, Hydro One's profits have gone up. Meanwhile, interest rates have gone down. Yet the Premier thinks it makes more sense to give up those rising profits instead of taking advantage of falling interest rates. It's just not fiscally responsible.

For every dollar in interest the government would save by selling Hydro One, Ontarians will give up \$2 in Hydro One profits—lost profits.

Does the Premier realize that two is bigger than one?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What we know is that contrary to what the third party would like to suggest, we cannot just keep borrowing to make these investments. At some point, we have to have the money in hand to be able to make—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The fact is that we ran on a plan to make the investments that we know are needed in terms of our economy. That means transit, roads and bridges. It means within the greater Toronto and Hamilton area; it means outside of the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. We know that companies want to come to Ontario, but they are not going to come if we don't have the infrastructure that will allow us to be competitive in the 21st century. That's why we're going to make these investments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Premier: The Premier's fire sale of Hydro One will mean giving away hundreds of millions of dollars in annual profits to Bay Street. Once you sell it, it is gone, gone, gone.

The Premier says this money will go to infrastructure. Just like the Harper government, the Premier wants these to be public-private partnerships. The Auditor General found that of the \$8 billion that the government wasted on public-private partnerships, \$6.5 billion went to the pockets of Bay Street financiers.

Hon. Brad Duguid: How are you going to fund public transit? You have no plan whatsoever to fund that Kitchener line.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development is warned.

Finish, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Some \$6.5 billion of this went into the pockets of Bay Street financiers. So the government will sell Hydro One to Bay Street in order to pay for P3s that benefit Bay Street.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Children and Youth Services, come to order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Mr. Speaker, when did the government decide to sell the province of Ontario to Bay Street?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the member opposite neglects to mention is that because of the strategy that we undertook to get the infrastructure built, we actually saved \$8 billion, in terms of risk, that we possibly could have spent.

I want to just be clear that the party opposite also has not made it clear and has neglected to—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Is the Pennysaver a Liberal Party publication?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke is warned. I think there's a budget this afternoon, so if anyone wants to test, I will name.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The third party has neglected to mention that in the plan that Ed Clark brought forward, we've made it clear that the government will retain control. Our government has been clear that broadening the ownership of Hydro One, retaining 40% ownership—Ontario will remain the largest shareholder. No other entity will be able to own more than 10%. We will have control over the board and the chair. Those protections are in place.

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question to the Minister of Education. Minister, students are still out of the classroom in Durham; it's their fourth day. Already we're getting a number of emails and letters and phone calls to our offices. No one is buying your excuse that these strikes are local.

Through the Speaker to the minister: There are simply no negotiations taking place at the local level. Students in

Sudbury will be locked out on April 27, and in Peel on May 4. That's 71,000 students across this province.

Minister, have you been given a coherent explanation yet, or do you now realize the strike is because of years and years of Liberal mismanagement?

Hon. Liz Sandals: What I'm pleased to report is what I've been able to report for the last few days. That is that the school board associations, representing the employer; the government, representing the funder; and the unions, representing the secondary teachers in the English public system, are all at the table. We all continue to work on negotiations because I think we all share the belief that the way to resolve this situation is to reach a negotiated collective agreement.

None of us want to see those students missing class. We all think that we need to get the students back into class as quickly as possible. The way to do that is to negotiate a collective agreement. That's what we are working very hard on right now at the central level.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Back to the minister: In four days, high school students are expected to see picket lines in Sudbury, and 11 days after that in Peel. That's four days for your staff to ensure that you aren't mystified or perplexed when another board walks away from the table. I've said it before, there are no negotiations taking place at the local level.

When you changed the bargaining system, you said, "It's quite clear now that the government has a requirement to bargain in good faith." Minister, if it's so clear, then why don't you know what is keeping students out of the classroom and cancelling proms and field trips?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Actually, the member has got his facts wrong because negotiations are ongoing in Rainbow and Peel. In fact, they've asked for a mediator from the Minister of Labour in each case to help support those.

But I'm not going to take a lecture on how we have managed education centrally from the party that, as part of its platform, committed to firing 22,000 education workers, including thousands of teachers. That was the way they thought they would manage the education system. That was going to make for great labour relations, when they arrived on the scene and decided to fire everybody.

1110

I quote from the PC campaign and the leader of the day. Mr. Hudak was asked, when he was leader, during the campaign, "Will it mean?"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A reminder: When I stand, Minister, you sit.

New question.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Premier. In my riding of Welland and across Hamilton, Niagara,

Haldimand and Brant, members of OPSEU 294 have been on strike since April 10.

The for-profit CarePartners has shown no respect for front-line nurses and refuses to bargain. The CCAC for-profit contracting-out is yet another example of this government's right-wing, austerity and privatization agenda. It's obvious that the for-profit system is not working in health care—it hasn't for years—and it's clear that the Premier has no intention of changing this system.

Speaker, has the Premier been too busy selling off our public assets to ensure that health care workers working for for-profit agencies are treated with respect and dignity?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, it's of utmost importance to this government that we respect our health care workers, the hundreds of thousands of health care workers around this province, who do important work each and every day, including—as the member is referring to—within our home and community care system, but also in our hospital system. That's why that respect and dignity that we afford to those important front-line workers—that we're continuing to invest in that important sector of this economy and a service that's so important to Ontarians.

Our investments in home care this year have gone up by 5%. That's a \$270-million increase. A significant portion of that, I should add, is specific to our personal support workers who are so essential across all health care environments, but particularly in the home and community sector, where we've made a commitment to them to increase their wage to a minimum of \$16.50. We're giving them a \$4 increase over a three-year period.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Speaker, this past week I've received countless emails from constituents who see the striking health workers not only as nurses but as family.

Denise Flannigan has been a patient of CarePartners for six years. She says that without the nurses, she would be "a young immobile woman in a convalescent home, wasting away, without interaction with others," and these nurses have given her a second, a third, a fourth and a forever chance at her life.

It's clear that patient care is being directly impacted because of CarePartners' failure to bargain, let alone bargain in good faith. These are taxpayers' dollars, and they should be spent on care, not profit.

Why is this Liberal government doing nothing to make sure that these for-profit health care agencies respect the bargaining process, and work in harmony with front-line workers to ensure that the 1,600 patients in this area—patients like Denise—continue to receive the good, quality care that they need?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite knows, in this particular case, that we aren't the employers. But we do implore both sides, quite frankly, to negotiate a solution which is respectful of the workers and respectful, most of all, of the individuals, the clients, that the mem-

ber opposite is referencing. That's why, earlier in January of this year, I received the report from Gail Donner on home and community care, to continue to help us shape the future for that important part of the health care sector.

We are making additional investments: 5% this year, an increase of 5% next year and the year after that. So compared to last year, it will be almost a three-quarters-of-a-billion-dollar increase in the budget that goes to home and community care.

In this specific example, again, I would just simply implore both parties, the employers—we're not the employers in this case—and the employees, to negotiate a solution which is respectful to all parties.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. As the member for Kitchener Centre, I can tell you that public transit is a very important issue to people living in my community. Last week, our government announced that we are going to be unlocking assets by offering shares in certain public assets, so that we can invest in transit and transportation, across the province.

On Friday, the Minister of Transportation and the Premier, Kathleen Wynne, announced plans for regional express rail. These are very exciting announcements, but people living in my community want to know exactly how these investments are going to benefit them. Can the minister please provide clarity—as there seem to be some members who are rather confused about this—as to how these investments are going to help my constituents living in Kitchener and all of Waterloo region?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member for Kitchener Centre, not only for the question today, but for championing her community and for being such a strong advocate.

As everyone knows, our government is making the single largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history through the Moving Ontario Forward plan. This plan will invest \$13.5 billion in improvements across the GO Transit network to increase ridership and reduce travel times, which will result in more than a doubling of peak service and a quadrupling of off-peak service compared to today, and reduce journey times for some cross-region transit trips by as much as 50%.

On the Kitchener line alone, Speaker, GO service will increase to more than 10 times current service levels. In addition, those living between Kitchener and Bramalea will benefit from express service to and from Union Station on the Kitchener line. We will continue to work with CN, who owns a portion of the Kitchener line, to find ways to make commuting faster for those living in Kitchener.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I want to thank the minister for his answer. It is encouraging to hear that people living in my community can expect to see increased GO rail service through the Moving Ontario Forward plan.

As the Minister of Transportation noted, we are making the single largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history. But there are still critics who are suggesting that our government is not doing enough to invest in transit and transportation in Waterloo region. Can the minister please tell members of this House what other investments our government is making in transit and transportation in Waterloo region?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again I thank that member for her question.

Speaker, I fundamentally disagree with anyone who suggests we are not investing in transit and transportation in Kitchener-Waterloo. Just look at some of the incredible projects we have under way in that important region: The initial phase of design has already been completed for the expansion of Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph; construction is set to begin in 2015. We've also committed up to \$300 million in funding for stage one of Waterloo's rapid transit system. By 2016, we will also add two additional morning and afternoon peak-period trips between Waterloo region and the GTA on the GO service.

We are making critical investments in Kitchener transit. Members of the opposing parties, the member from Kitchener-Conestoga and the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, should remember that, when they had the chance in 2012 and 2013 and 2014, they and their parties voted against every single budget to deliver for their communities.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question.

RETAIL ALCOHOL SALES

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. The people of Leeds-Grenville have seen your beer sales plan, and it has left them with a bit of a hangover. They know you can't manage it and that it's just an attempt to distract people from your disastrous Hydro One sell-off and your inability to manage our economy.

What they're most upset about is that rural Ontario has been left empty-handed with your half-baked plan. True to form, though, you haven't missed an opportunity to tax us. Premier, why are the people of my riding good enough to pay your \$100-million beer tax but get none of your 450 licences?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I would just say to the member opposite that I think he knows there was inherent unfairness in the model of the Beer Store that had evolved over time. As Ed Clark looked at the assets in this province and realized that the inherent unfairness could be addressed—craft brewers, for example, around the province were telling us repeatedly that they couldn't get access to shelf space and that they couldn't grow their market shares.

The changes that Ed Clark has proposed and that we are adopting will address some of that unfairness. What we know is that, in some small towns in rural commun-

ities, if there is a grocery store and a Beer Store and an LCBO or an agency store, that distribution network is working quite well for those communities. What we don't want to do is set up a situation where, actually, a grocery store in a community or a Beer Store would shut down—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Supplementary?

1120

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: The fact is that none of your licences are going to communities under 30,000 in population. You know that that cap shuts out my entire riding and most of rural Ontario.

That means an innovative grocer like Neil Kudrinko, in Westport, can't expand and hire new staff—not because he doesn't have the ability, but because you say his store is located in the wrong part of Ontario. It's the same thing for Lynn Laming at Kitley Grocery in Toledo.

You're picking winners and losers based on geography. That's wrong. If you were truly the Premier for all of Ontario, you'd make sure that in this afternoon's budget, you would change that 30,000 population cap. Will you do that and allow businesses to compete based on merit and not their postal code?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the member opposite is saying is that he thinks, basically, we should just open up the distribution network, and beer should be available everywhere. Just be careful, because when you look at other jurisdictions where that has happened, what you see is, the beer price goes up by about \$5 for a two-four.

The fact is, we are trying to find that balance of keeping a distribution network—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, when Ed Clark and his team looked at the distribution network, and they looked at the prices in other jurisdictions, what he determined was that if we were to go the route of some of those other jurisdictions—

Mr. Steve Clark: You need to get out of Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and have beer everywhere, the price would go up. So what the Tories are saying is they—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I just finished asking the member from Leeds–Grenville to come to order. Now he's warned.

New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. London is home to one of the most state-of-the-art and respected medical facilities in the country. Yet Londoners of all ages have contacted my offices, included

seniors with mobility issues and limited incomes, telling me they are forced to wait—in some cases, for years—for appointments with a medical specialist, or are told to leave London for that service.

Premier, can you explain why people living right beside a world-class facility are being told they can't have access to it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite knows that we're making significant investments right across this province, in fact, to bring down the wait times for a whole number of procedures. In fact, for those surgical procedures that we are measuring, we went from last place, when we came into office in 2003, to first place in the entire country. So those investments that we're making and continuing to make are paying off.

I know the member opposite will want to acknowledge, along with me, some important details of an announcement that was made earlier this week that affects her city of London, and which impacts, in a positive way, patient care as well. I'm happy to speak to that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Back to the Premier: After wasting billions of taxpayer dollars on eHealth, Ornge scandals—and now you are cutting front-line nursing jobs across the province—it's clear that this government is dismantling one of the most respected health care systems in the world, piece by piece.

Can the Premier explain why all Ontarians, including the most vulnerable seniors and low-income families, are being further penalized by your inability to safeguard their health care tax dollars?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: In the last decade, in London specifically, we've increased our funding to hospitals by \$272 million. In addition, as I referred to earlier, we've made significant investments as well—almost \$100 million in investments—to bring those wait times down, and a significant portion of that in London, and \$14 million to the London Health Sciences Centre alone. We are making those important investments.

As well, I want to reference earlier this week, where the province approved funding in London for the operation of a new mental health and addictions crisis centre—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member who asked the question, come to order.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know the member opposite is interested in this. The head of Canadian Mental Health Association Middlesex said that this is really great news for folks with mental illness and addictions. It's a 24-hour walk-in centre that will provide 10 beds for one- to three-day stays for people suffering a crisis who don't require hospitalization.

These are the important investments—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Attorney General. As the minister knows, assisting victims of crime with the respect and services they deserve when they need it the most has always been a priority for our government. I know this is an important issue for the people in Kingston and the Islands, and I'm proud of the support that this government provides.

In light of our guests who have received recognition for their outstanding efforts in victim services, could the Attorney General please enlighten this House on some of the core services that this government provides to victims of crime through the Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario program?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Let me say a big thanks to this wonderful MPP from Kingston and the Islands. I know that she's very, very involved in this very important issue.

Our government has been and will continue to be a leader in upholding victims' rights while providing the services they need. Victims in Ontario have timely access to supports such as 24/7 in-person crisis intervention at the request of police; enhanced support for vulnerable victims, including the development of personalized service plans; and referrals to other community supports and services when needed.

These are just a few examples of exceptional services our government has made available to victims of crime to assist them in their time of need.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: This morning we recognized a group of outstanding individuals involved in the front-line care of victims. The Victim Services Awards of Distinction is an annual ceremony in which the Attorney General presents awards to individuals or organizations that have made significant contributions to the provision of victim services in Ontario.

I am proud to say that one of the award winners, Pamela Cross, is an accomplished lawyer from my riding, who is well known for her deep commitment to improving women's access to justice and for her tireless advocacy for abused women right across this province.

Could the Attorney General please tell us more about these leaders in victim services?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I was very impressed this morning with these people who work day in and day out for victim services. They are heroes in their respective communities.

This morning we had these wonderful 15 recipients. They have been nominated for this award because they raised the profile of victims' issues in Ontario, volunteered countless hours of their time and delivered exceptional services in innovative ways to better serve victims of crime.

I was very touched this morning to see a group from Sault Ste. Marie who delivered wonderful services last year to the victims' families from Elliot Lake. I was there with them. I saw first-hand how dedicated they are and

how important this service is for the victims. I want to thank them on behalf of the Legislature this morning for everything they do and everything they have done.

APPLE INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Twice in the House this week you referenced the apple industry. As you will be aware, the industry has approached your Liberal government many times, and I have written and spoken in this House about the need to initiate an orchard revitalization program. Yet we receive nothing more than lip service. The industry is eager to rebuild, to increase export prospects and in fact to meet your challenge to the ag sector to create 120,000 jobs. The entire industry can be rejuvenated for an investment of \$25 million over seven years.

Minister, will you do more than spew hot air, and ask your government to commit to supporting an investment in apple growers?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: One of the things about climate change is that it is very difficult on farm and farm communities. We know that, which is why we are taking such strong measures in Ontario and working with California, Quebec, British Columbia, Manitoba, New York and many other jurisdictions, because we realize that we've got to create better conditions.

We also know that North Americans are going to be more reliant on Ontario food in the future because of the droughts in places like California, which produces 30% of our food. So we have to work very closely with the farm community, which is why the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has endorsed cap and trade as an option. They realize that there are huge opportunities for farm communities in sequestration and in offsets. They also realize that we've got to act on climate change to protect apple production and other important produce in this province.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the minister: Enough of the verbal fog. You're quick to find money when it's politically convenient to cover one of your many boondoggles. However, when the apple industry suffered severe production losses, you offered little more than hollow words and platitudes. If you are sincere, if you really want to make a difference and protect the thousands of jobs in this industry and ensure apples continue to be grown in Ontario, you will do more than exhale hot air into the atmosphere.

Your last budget failed to recognize this important agriculture partner. Can the apple industry count on an investment being included in today's budget to ensure the sustainability of this key agriculture partner and healthy food source? Or is it simply more hot air that will save the planet?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We have the agri-food fund, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to take a moment here because Don McCabe and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture are on

the minister's action group. They are there for one reason: The money that comes to us through our climate strategy has to be reinvested back into things like electrification of public transit, but it also has to go to help farmers and businesses adapt, which is so critical.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is a member of a party which—we cannot understand what their position is on climate change. They seem to have no understanding at all of the risks involved or the damage.

Just two days ago, the federal government—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound come to order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray:—tabled a budget that had no support for farmers and climate change, that had not a red penny—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm also asking the member from Huron–Bruce and the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry to come to order. I've asked you twice.

The member from Nickel Belt.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. The Minister of Health says that team-based primary care is the front door of our health care system, and I fully agree with him. But our primary care teams are struggling to recruit and retain health care professionals, the very people who can open the door for patients.

Under the Liberals, compensation in primary care has been kept low, and it has been frozen for the last nine years. That means that, now, one out of five nurse practitioner positions in primary care is sitting empty, and patients are forced to wait longer for the care they need. In northern Ontario, the area I represent, the statistics are even worse.

Will the minister finally act today to attract nurses and health care professionals back to primary health care teams and give them a reason to stay?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I've had quite a number of conversations with our nurses and the associations that represent them about this specific challenge. We need to admit that it's not just nurses alone; it's other health care practitioners in certain environments. It's an issue of recruitment and retention that the ministry and I are looking at very seriously. It's important to address effectively.

Also, I have to go back to the Hansard yesterday and the member opposite's claim. I want to be helpful and perhaps help her to correct her own record where she talked about the claim that Sudbury was cutting 42 positions. Once again, I'm happy to go through each hospital just to help the member opposite understand what the truth is. Health Sciences North in Sudbury has confirmed that no nurses will lose their jobs. In fact, none

of the efficiency measures are expected to result in nurses being laid off at the hospital. The hospital's statement that they issued said—I'll continue with this in supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Our primary care teams are working hard to keep families healthy, and patients love them. But this Liberal government is refusing to recognize health care professionals for the hard work they do and refusing to attract new talent to the primary care sector. Ontario's nurse practitioners in primary care are the third-lowest-paid in this entire country. What does that mean? That means enrolment has also fallen by a third. We will have further problems recruiting, and that means thousands of patients are without the care they should be getting from a primary health care team.

Minister, you can fix the problem today. Will the minister act to recruit and retain health care professionals in primary health care teams, or will he allow his government to stand back and break yet another promise?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Before we came into office, there were no nurse practitioner-led clinics. Now we have 25 clinics around the province serving thousands and thousands of Ontarians.

But to get back to Health Sciences North, it said that it anticipates that no nurses—not the 42, as claimed by the member opposite—will have to leave the system. There are also an additional 44 vacancies for registered nurses and registered practical nurses.

To get back to Lakeridge hospital, perhaps the member didn't hear. She does have the chance to correct her record, of course, of calling it a “devastating impact on quality of care.” According to her, 20% of the staff doing genetics at Lakeridge are being laid off. In fact, the hospital has disagreed. Patients will not be impacted. In fact, patient care will be dramatically improved because they're using better technology, better tests, faster results, and all three individuals she's talking about still have jobs.

MINING SAFETY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Ontario's mining sector directly employs 27,000 Ontarians and supports a further 50,000 jobs through its supply chain and support activities. Our mining sector is the strongest in Canada, with a total production topping \$10.7 billion. It's clear that Ontario's mining employers are benefiting greatly from the skills and hard work of the men and women who work in our mines.

Minister, in 2013, your ministry convened a Mining Health, Safety and Prevention Advisory Group to review mining practices in the province. Recently, the minister was in Sudbury to announce the completion of this advisory group's work. Will the minister please enlighten this House as to the results of that review?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd be very, very happy to do that, and thank you to the honourable member for that excellent question.

I was pleased to be joined recently by the honourable member from Sudbury and Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer. We opened the mining workplace health and safety conference and we accepted the final report that was put forward by the Mining Health, Safety and Prevention Advisory Group.

This excellent report contains 18 recommendations on how the mining sector can be improved. I'm proud to say that this government accepts each and every one of those recommendations. Some of the final recommendations:

Employers will have formal water management programs in place.

Workplaces will enhance ground control protections to track and monitor seismic activity.

The ministry will work with employers and labour to conduct regular mining sector risk assessments.

Employers will have plans in place to manage hazards that cause occupational disease.

This isn't the end of the process. It's part of continuous work that's going to go on to make Ontario's mines the safest in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Ontario's mining community will be pleased to know that the government is making the health and safety of Ontario's miners such an important priority.

I understand that the mining workplace health and safety conference based much of their discussion around the report and its recommendations, and that the announcement was well received by all of the stakeholders, particularly in my community of Sudbury.

Speaker, through you back to the Minister of Labour, can the minister please outline some of the things people are saying in reaction to the Mining Health, Safety and Prevention Advisory Group's final report?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The honourable member is absolutely correct: The report, based on the work of the people who did it, is receiving praise from right across the mining sector, from employers and labour groups alike.

Let me give you some of the quotes. This comes from Wendy Fram, the mother of a young man who was tragically killed in a mining accident. She says, "I am pleased that the government has listened to the mining community and is taking positive action to make Ontario's underground mines safer."

John Perquin from the United Steelworkers: "The health and the lives of the thousands of women and men who work in the mining industry in Ontario are dependent upon the improvements being recommended."

Chris Hodgson from the Ontario Mining Association itself: "These recommendations bring us closer to the goal we all share of zero harm in the workplace."

"We believe that the recommendations that have been put forward in the report will assist Vale and all companies within Ontario's mining sector in becoming safer places to work." That comes from Angie Robson from Vale.

These are just a few examples of what's being said about this excellent review based on the hard work of everybody in Ontario's mining industry.

1140

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. On Monday the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled against your ministry and in favour of the Prince Edward County Field Naturalists in their quest to keep an industrial wind turbine factory from destroying the delicate ecosystem on the south shore of Prince Edward county. The opinion by the court stated that the Environmental Review Tribunal was correct in using expert evidence that showed the project would result in serious and irreversible harm to the ecosystem when it refused to grant approval to this project back in 2013.

Minister, will you do the right thing in this case? Will you save the Blanding's turtle? Will you protect the environment in Prince Edward county? Will you prevent your ministry from wasting further taxpayer resources by refusing to join any more appeals launched by the developer Ostrander Point GP Inc.?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I love Blanding's turtles, and I want to commend the people of your constituency for their activism. We have a very good process of environmental assessment and a court process with our Environmental Bill of Rights. It's one of the best in the world. This minister respects that and thinks that the people should come out ahead in these processes.

I cannot comment in detail because of my role, and I think the member knows the restrictions that I have. I will go one further though, because this is something that's important to me. I would be quite happy to meet with you, because I think we have larger issues of biodiversity loss with climate change. We have challenges right now with neurotoxic pesticides that are impacting amphibians and water invertebrates, and these issues are becoming more acute. There are some other environmental concerns with other species that I think we both share.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Minister, this isn't just another community group that's opposing this project, although I thank you for commending their efforts in Prince Edward county. One of the intervening parties that joined the Field Naturalists in Prince Edward county was Nature Canada.

Your ministry has known for years that this project would destroy the ecosystem in southern Prince Edward county, and you've not only turned a blind eye to the fact; you've actively committed taxpayer resources to help the developer destroy an ecosystem.

Your own experts, Minister, at the Ontario Environmental Review Tribunal, the Ontario Court of Appeal and Nature Canada—who, by the way, do believe in wind power, just not at this particular site—are telling you that this project is environmentally destructive.

Will you commit here today that the Ministry of the Environment will not waste any more taxpayer resources in aiding the developer in further appeals for this project, either in court or at the ERT? Will you do that? End taxpayers' involvement, end your ministry's involvement, quit the shell game and end this in Prince Edward county.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The role of the environment minister is the end of an adjudicative process with environmental assessments and other things. It would prejudice any process for me to comment on that specifically. But to say that I am not concerned about it would be quite wrong.

I would go further because, as I said earlier, I would describe what we're facing right now on this planet as a biodiversity crisis. We are tracking to lose about one third of our species right now on this planet, and it's very serious. You talk to farmers; you talk to folks who have cottages. We are losing species at an unprecedented rate.

I cannot talk about the specifics of this, but I do believe the member is sincere in the concern, as are his constituents, and I would be happy to meet privately with him to discuss this because I do believe that I'm accountable to him and other members. I wish I could be more forthcoming but I can't without compromising my position as minister.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Leeds–Grenville has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question of the Premier concerning the government beer sale plan. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. on Tuesday.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, on a point of order.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to welcome to the House my former high school teacher Mr. Hassan Ali Vahid, accompanied by his granddaughter Ms. Negar Hashemi, who is a lawyer and also president of the Iranian Women's Organization of Ontario, and Mr. Shahram Basiri.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1145 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I would like to introduce Ausma Malik and Marit Stiles, who are both Toronto District School Board trustees who will be joining us in the gallery later today.

I would also like to introduce James Ryan, who is the president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association.

I believe James will also be joining us in the gallery later.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I just want to mention that we were out in the cold for the flag-raising for Israel Independence Day today, Yom Ha'atzmaut, with Israeli Consul D.J. Schneeweiss and my friends Mira Hamat and Randy Maxwell. Thank you for coming, everybody.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HYDRO RATES

Mrs. Julia Munro: Today I would like to bring a voice from the riding of York–Simcoe into this House. The first-hand accounts of my constituents are very important to me, but they're also growing daily.

People are telling me how getting by under the policies of this government is becoming more and more difficult. More and more constituents are telling me they can't make ends meet. Scarcity of good jobs; the cost of living—these are common themes. But my constituents say that the price of electricity is causing them the most trouble.

One constituent wrote, "I try to conserve energy by using only one light in the house in the evening, no lights during the day, use cold water to do my laundry during off-peak hours, seldom use my dishwasher, cook meals every other night and microwave leftovers the second night. During the winter months, I keep my house at 17 degrees Celsius during the night and from 18 to 20 degrees during the day, open all the blinds to let sunlight in during the winter to increase heat and close blinds in the summer to keep heat out. My furnace is checked to make sure it is efficient.... I must keep my house relatively cool and humidity down in the summer. Electrical appliances have been replaced...."

"I expect that my hydro bill will increase by at least \$100 a month next year. That number does not include any increase of hydro rates that Hydro One may get permission to add."

These are real people having these difficulties. It's important for us to recognize what we are doing to the people of Ontario.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to rise today and discuss the passing of Niagara Falls firefighter Tim Hoday, who died in the line of duty. I want to send my condolences to his friends and family, who were present at an incredibly moving funeral that was held in his honour.

I'd like to recognize the Niagara Falls Fire Department and the Niagara Falls Professional Firefighters Association for organizing such a moving tribute. I'd also like to thank all firefighters and emergency personnel from across the province who made their way to Niagara to pay their respects to Brother Hoday.

Tim passed away from a workplace cancer that he contracted through his years in the line of duty for his community. Tim's passing highlights how far we've come in the need to ensure that the injuries that our first responders are vulnerable to are covered, but also how much further we need to go, especially when it comes to the issue of PTSD for first responders, an illness which still isn't covered.

These brave men and women put their lives on the line to serve our communities, and for that they deserve our respect. I am always proud to stand in this House and support our local first responders.

This Legislature has made great strides when it comes to workplace illness coverage. When it comes to our first responders, who put their lives on the line for us, we should never stop working at trying to make all workplaces safer and expanding coverage to those affected by work-related illness.

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE ANNIVERSARY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I rise today with a heavy heart to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, which began on April 24, 1915. Today, on behalf of Cambridge constituents, I want to pay homage to those who perished and suffered in the Ottoman Empire. Some 1.5 million Armenians were killed between 1915 and 1923. Many millions more were displaced and affected by the deaths of their families and friends. Many Armenians immigrated to southern Ontario where they contribute greatly to the diversity and vitality of our communities.

This past Sunday, I was honoured to attend an event in my riding of Cambridge to mark the centennial of this tragedy. The event was held at the Cambridge Armenian Community Center, the largest Armenian centre in the southwestern region. I was pleased to be invited by Saro Sarmazian from the Armenian National Committee of Southwestern Ontario.

I was one of five MPs, two MPPs—including my colleague across the way—and a local city councillor who spoke in memory of the Armenian genocide. People from all around southwestern Ontario and even as far away as Michigan came to share stories from their families and contribute to the healing process.

When we come together in remembrance of atrocities like the Armenian genocide, we take a stand against unspeakable acts of violence. I encourage all my colleagues and all Ontarians to take a moment tomorrow to look back upon the Armenian genocide and remember those who have senselessly suffered.

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Michael Harris: It is with great sadness that I stand with the Armenian Canadian community here in the Ontario Legislative Assembly today to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

The systematic deportations and massacres of Armenians from their historic homelands began on April 24, 1915, by order of the Ottoman Empire. Hundreds of Armenian public figures, politicians, clergymen, educators and artists were arrested and executed in the capital or sent into exile.

In the next phase of the genocide, Armenian people were taken from their homes and forced to march for hundreds of miles without food and water into the Syrian desert, later to be killed. This horrendous tragedy took the lives of over one and a half million Armenians.

On April 24, people of Armenian descent all over the world recall the memorials and memories of the Armenian genocide—what has been called the first genocide of the 20th century. This tragic history must never be forgotten and it must never be denied. Such terrible acts of hatred cannot be tolerated in a democratic society.

Just last week, Pope Francis said it was “necessary, and indeed a duty” to remember the Armenians killed, “for whenever memory fades, it means that evil allows wounds to fester. Concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding without bandaging it.”

As MPP for Kitchener–Conestoga, I would like to assert that I stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our Armenian community as you observe this most solemn occasion.

JOHN MCGIVNEY CHILDREN'S CENTRE SCHOOL

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program in my riding of Windsor West is much too important to lose.

The preschool program offers a highly-specialized setting for children in their early years and teaches families best practices when caring for children with special and, in many cases, complex needs. Graduates of the program go on to the John McGivney Children's Centre School or attend a neighbourhood school, and all are proud ambassadors of this program in our community.

Program participants benefit from dedicated teachers and the preschool is placed to take advantage of the highly trained staff and state-of-the-art facilities offered at the John McGivney centre.

This one-of-a-kind program is a jewel of southwestern Ontario and services families from Windsor, Tecumseh, Essex and even as far as Leamington. It's no wonder that, when the program announced it would need to close due to a provincial funding shortfall, so many in Windsor and Essex county united to keep the program open.

Whether it was young Gabby Wilkinson, who launched a GoFundMe page, Brianne Deneau who quickly started an online petition, or all of the concerned parents and community members who dropped off a signed petition at my office, it was clear that this program had the overwhelming support of the community.

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It is truly unfortunate that this year's class will be the last to graduate from this outstanding program. I hope

everyone in this chamber can recognize the value of this program and the need to make up any funding shortfall to ensure that it can continue to service children with special needs and their families across southwestern Ontario.

Speaker, it's a privilege to voice the concerns of my constituents here at Queen's Park. On this issue, the simple and overwhelming consensus is that the John McGivney Children's Centre is just too important to lose.

BILL BLAIR

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise in the House to recognize Toronto's outgoing chief of police and one of Scarborough's very own, Chief Bill Blair.

Chief Blair spent his early years in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, where he attended Sir John A. Macdonald Collegiate Institute—known there by many as football star “Blee.”

Chief Blair's 35-year policing career began as a foot patrol officer in Regent Park. He would continue on with assignments in drug enforcement, organized crime and major criminal investigations, but he never forgot his roots, eventually returning to Regent Park as Division 51 superintendent in 1995.

In 1996, I met the young and energetic Superintendent Blair at a Regent Park school event. Speaking with Councillor Pam McConnell after the event, I predicted that one day, Bill Blair would become Toronto's chief of police. Clearly, he left an impression on me at that time.

In April 2005, he was appointed as Toronto's ninth chief of police. Over his 10 years as chief, Bill Blair has modernized the police service, improved community relations and supported diversity and inclusion within the service and broader community. This includes being the first Toronto chief of police to walk in the Pride Parade and increasing the percentage of women and visible minorities employed on the force.

As we thank Chief Blair for his exceptional dedication, we welcome Toronto's 10th chief of police, Mark Saunders.

ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mrs. Gila Martow: Last week, we remembered the Jewish victims of the Holocaust on Yom ha-Shoah. Yesterday, we remembered those who died to recreate the Jewish homeland on Yom Hazikaron. Today, we celebrate the re-establishment of the Jewish state, the creation of the state of Israel, on Yom Ha'atzmaut.

My maternal grandparents travelled to the British territory of Palestine in the early 1930s with groups of their friends from Hashomer Hatzair, a Zionist youth organization, to establish one of the early kibbutz co-operatives. By planting trees, building homes and having children of their own, these pioneers helped Israel grow into the flourishing land and democracy that we know today.

We all bear witness to the result. Israel is the only true democracy in the Middle East. There are Arab members of Parliament, women in the army, and those of any sexual orientation are celebrated. It's these values that Canadians and Israelis share, and these shared values that enable the unique relationship between our two great countries. It's for all of these reasons that we've come together to celebrate Israel today and why we must remain vigilant for the anti-Semitism and persecution that continue to persist.

Regretfully, Al-Quds Day has been celebrated for several years on the grounds of the provincial Legislature, the very institution that acts to protect the rights and dignity of each and every single Ontarian. Mr. Speaker, it is your duty to ensure that a gathering of such a reprehensible nature will not be permitted near our institution. Am Yisroel Chai.

BUSINESSES IN HALTON

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to rise today to talk about a very special event in my riding of Halton, an event in which three chambers of commerce came together and showcased Halton's economic strength. It was also a perfect introduction to the innovative leaders we have working in our business community.

The luncheon began with a speech from the Premier, our guest of honour. The event was hosted by the Milton, Oakville and Burlington Chambers of Commerce. Together, these chambers represent nearly 3,000 businesses throughout Halton. They foster innovation, attract new investments and encourage the talent, creativity and dedication of Halton's business community to create new economic opportunities and keep our region at the forefront of economic growth. I commend the chambers on their ability to collaborate and closely work together, and put on a successful event.

Following the event, we had an opportunity to engage with leaders of the local business community, leaders like Damion and Kevin, long-time friends who founded Orange Snail Brewers, Milton's first craft brewery. These two young gentlemen perfectly represent the talented, motivated and innovative individuals who are creating jobs, supporting their local communities and helping to grow Ontario's economy. These are exactly the kinds of businesses and the kinds of business owners that our government is committed to supporting, because when they succeed, Ontario succeeds.

The day ended in Burlington at the Canadian-Croatian Chamber of Commerce business awards. Speaker, the entire day was a wonderful reminder of the strength and diversity of Halton's economic climate.

NEXXICE SYNCHRONIZED SKATING CLUB

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I rise in the House today to acknowledge and congratulate the Nexxice Synchronized Skating Club, based out of the Burlington skating club in my riding.

This winter, I had the privilege to watch the Nexxice novice team in action as they performed at my first annual Family Day Fun Skate at Mainway arena. Their team motto, "Connected in the pursuit of excellence," is fitting, if you've ever watched them glide across the ice in unison. They are the personification of grace and athleticism.

On April 10 and 11, the Nexxice senior team competed against 25 teams from 20 different countries at the ISU World Synchronized Skating Championships in Hamilton. Led by coach Shelley Burnett and choreographer Anne Schelter, for the first time in six years on home ice, on national television, Nexxice took home the first gold for Canada since 2009—so exciting.

The event marked the largest crowd ever for the synchro world championships, with over 7,000 fans in attendance. Each team is comprised of 16 skaters, and they must perform two programs and fulfil several program and technical components, making for a very entertaining event.

Nexxice produced two perfect skates. Skating to Mud by the Road Hammers in the short, Nexxice got the hometown crowd going. Performing to Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue in the free program, they skated with beautifully executed lifts and clean lines from start to finish, landing them in first place as the new world champs.

I speak on behalf of everyone in attendance when I say that this team and their coaches have worked so hard to get where they are today. I congratulate each and every one of them on their recent gold medal at the ISU World Championships.

Go, Nexxice, go.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

JOUR DE LA TERRE EARTH DAY

L'hon. Glen R. Murray: J'ai le plaisir de prendre la parole aujourd'hui pour célébrer la Semaine de la Terre. Hier j'ai participé à un événement du Jour de la Terre avec plusieurs amis et collègues ici même, à Queen's Park, et nous nous sommes engagés à réduire notre empreinte carbone et faire le « Jour de la Terre, tous les jours ».

Le premier Jour de la Terre a eu lieu le 22 avril 1970. Depuis ce premier événement, le Jour de la Terre a évolué pour devenir un mouvement mondial dans le cadre duquel 192 pays tiennent des événements du Jour de la Terre.

Jour de la Terre Canada célèbre son 25^e anniversaire cette année et son objectif est d'inciter les gens de partout au pays à participer à un effort national visant à réduire leur empreinte carbone de 20 % d'ici 2020.

Il me fait plaisir de confirmer que l'Ontario atteint ses objectifs de réduction des gaz à effet de serre. Mon

ministère travaille à la rédaction de notre prochaine stratégie exhaustive en matière de changement climatique afin de s'assurer que nous continuons d'atteindre nos objectifs. Notre gouvernement prend des mesures et ne se contente pas de parler de protection de l'air, du sol et de l'eau de l'Ontario.

Le plus récent rapport de l'inspectrice en chef de l'eau potable montre que 99,83 % des analyses d'eau potable soumises par les municipalités ont donné des résultats qui satisfaisaient aux normes strictes de qualité de l'eau potable de l'Ontario.

In addition, we are nearing the completion of our source water protection plans, with Essex as our newest and 16th approved source water protection plan.

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The 2013 air quality report confirms that our air quality has improved significantly. For the first time in 20 years, no smog advisories were issued in Ontario due to ozone. To provide even more protection for our environment and for the earth in general, our province took another important step forward last week by announcing its intent to join California and Quebec to reduce damaging greenhouse gas pollution by way of emissions trading in a carbon market. A cap-and-trade system will build on the progress we have already made—such as closing our coal plants, the single largest GHG-reduction initiative in North America—and continuing to electrify our public transit systems.

While we are making extraordinary progress, the threats to our planet have never been greater. CO₂ pollution is driving unprecedented climate change. Ocean and lake acidification, and deforestation, remind us how much more we have to do and how little time we have to do it in. But we can and must succeed, Mr. Speaker.

I want to take this moment to recognize the initiatives of my Premier, Premier Wynne; and our colleagues Premier Couillard and Governor Brown, whose international leadership on fighting climate change is an expression of the values we celebrate during Earth Week. I encourage all Ontarians to join me in following their leadership and making Earth Day every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's now time for responses.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's my pleasure to speak to the 45th Earth Day, that was celebrated yesterday. Earth Day is an initiative that takes place in over 190 countries across the world, all who show their support for environmental protection.

Across Ontario, there are events being held throughout the week in celebration. I know, in my riding of Huron-Bruce this week, there will be many schools participating in programs to encourage students to be environmentally aware.

For instance, just last Monday, St. Anthony's School in Kincardine celebrated Earth Day early with a Terra-Cycle presentation, a donation to the biodegradable program, and a school-wide community cleanup effort. It was a great initiative put forth by the students, teachers and volunteers who helped to clean up the neighbourhood around the school. Additionally, Chalmers Com-

munity Church donated \$300 to the school to support green initiatives, such as updating their outdoor classroom and garden. In Port Elgin last night, at the public library, they hosted an Earth Day drop-in craft session, where children came and built crafts out of recycled materials.

These types of initiatives are celebrated in my community, and I greatly appreciate all the effort staff and volunteers put towards these programs.

I'd be remiss if I didn't say I was speaking to my husband on Tuesday evening, and he said, "Don't forget about the special day tomorrow." Jokingly, I said, "Earth Day?" He said, "Of course." But it was also his birthday.

I mention my husband because on Saturday morning, the entire Schiestel clan, in memory of Dennis's parents, will be participating in a roadside cleanup along Bruce Road 6. It's an annual thing that we do every year.

Applause.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you.

It's important that we educate our public, especially our youth, on the importance of being environmental stewards. I just recently met with Earth Rangers, a great program here in Canada that engages youth across Canada to care about their environment. Peter Kendall, the executive director, shared with me that more than 270,000 kids have worked together to raise over \$1.6 million for the Bring Back the Wild conservation project. This is an amazing achievement. The education that programs such as Earth Rangers provide is fundamental inspiration to the next generation of environmental stewards.

In speaking to Peter, it reminded me of a program that is close to my heart—everybody knows it—the 4-H program in Ontario. It, too, is an excellent incubator, if you will, of environmental stewards.

It's important that we do have a day to raise awareness for just how important our environment is. It affects everyone and truly, every day should be Earth Day.

Now I'd like to move on to speaking about the environment in a little bit more detail, with a political perspective on it. The environment should never be a political partisan issue. It should never be something that people should use for perceived political gain. However, that is something that I'm afraid I see, day in and day out, with this government. The environment is far too important to play games with.

We saw, just a few weeks back, when the Liberals came out with a news conference and press release claiming the PCs didn't care about the environment. But nothing could be further from the truth. I would like to remind everyone, in the spirit of Earth Day, that it was the PC Party of Ontario that created the Ministry of the Environment. In 2001, Ontario's former Minister of the Environment, Elizabeth Witmer, issued a regulation requiring the phase-out of coal-burning at the Lakeview generating station, which reduced the province's total coal-fired electricity generation capacity by 15%.

Subsequently, in 2003, the Liberals ran on a campaign that promised to end coal-fired electricity generation in

the province by 2007. Ten years after the announcement, and six years past the deadline, we have finally realized that. So, yes, it is nice to cheer about the elimination of coal-powered plants, but we also must acknowledge how poorly this file has been managed.

I would just like to share with you, Speaker, that it was the PC Party of Ontario that created wetlands and stands for conservation, and we are an environmental party right here in Ontario. I just wish the other side of the House would recognize that.

In terms of cap-and-trade, I have to share with you, Speaker, that never, ever would we use the seriousness of Earth Day and caring for our environment as an excuse to introduce a revenue tool for a cash-strapped government.

In conclusion, I want to circle back to Earth Day, and I want to reiterate the importance of environmental awareness. Thank you to everyone who has participated in environmental awareness and initiatives this week. We all can do our part. Here's to maintaining Earth Day 365 days a year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm pleased to rise today to speak on the occasion of Earth Week. As you're well aware, Speaker, the challenges that our province faces are very broad, very deep. I want to address just two of those challenges.

The economic impact of global warming is projected by the British government to be comparable to the impact of World War II or the Great Depression. That projection was put forward in 2006. The science has become gloomier since then, and I would say the challenges we face are on a larger scale.

As you're well aware, Speaker, except for the coal phase-out, that was supported by all parties in this Legislature, the Liberal approach to global warming has simply been adrift for a number of years. As big as the coal phase-out was, it was not enough to allow Ontario to meet its greenhouse gas emission reductions. It took the recession and large-scale loss of industry to actually bring us to the reduction that we needed, but we currently don't have a plan to meet the targets that were set for the year 2020.

For those who disagree with my analysis, I urge them to read the reports of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, over the last five years, who chronicled the weaker and weaker response of the Liberal government to global warming.

The urgency of the problem has mounted. My hope is that the government will bring forward a useful and ambitious plan for action this year.

For our part, we in the NDP intend to hold the government to account for a plan that must be fair, must be effective and must be transparent. All of those conditions need to be part of a plan that will actually make a difference to people in Ontario and make sure that the burden of whatever efforts are undertaken is equitably shared amongst the people and the economic sectors of this province.

I want to speak as well about the health of the Great Lakes. I had an opportunity recently to go on for about an

hour on that matter, but I want to speak particularly about the fact that we, in the NDP, have supported the creation of a Great Lakes protection act for many years. We will be happy when an act—and I think there will be some amendments to whatever act comes forward—when a suitably amended act that will be stronger is passed.

But we are not happy that the government still plans to bury nuclear waste in the watershed of Lake Huron. Residents are not happy; environmental groups are not happy; legislators in Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, New York and Indiana are not happy. The only one happy seems to be the government of Ontario.

Why would a minister who has tabled the Great Lakes Protection Act be happy to let a government agency bury nuclear waste in the watershed of Lake Huron? It makes no sense to put that nuclear waste there.

1330

If the plan made little sense to begin with, it makes even less sense now. We now know that the plan involves deadlier nuclear waste and more of it than was originally proposed. We now know that the waste storage technology is even riskier than we thought after the accident that occurred in New Mexico in the Americans' nuclear waste dump a few years ago, using the technology that Ontario Power Generation is promoting. We now know that provincial officials met with local officials behind closed doors in meetings that were found to have violated the law.

This government controls Ontario Power Generation. It can set direction for these technologies, for these actions. It needs to set direction and action for this particular project. It needs to act on the climate. It needs to protect the Great Lakes. It should be using the powers that are in its hands to take that action.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PETITIONS

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all" school board employees "to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with the petition, affix my name and give it to page Jae Min.

ASTHMA

Mr. Jeff Yurek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas on October 9, 2012, 12-year-old Ryan Gibbons unnecessarily died of an asthma attack at school;

"Whereas one in five students in Ontario schools has asthma; and

"Whereas asthma is a disease that can be controlled; and

"Whereas it is the responsibility of Ontario schools to ensure asthma-safe environments;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Education to take measures to protect pupils with asthma by ensuring all school boards put in place asthma-management plans based on province-wide standards."

I fully support this petition, affix my signature and hope everyone supports my bill next Thursday.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over northern Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

"Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

"Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

"Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to mandate "the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Colton to bring it to the Clerk.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Joe Dickson: A petition to the Legislature of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Windsor-Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

"Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spinoff jobs) for our community; and

"Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

"Whereas the inability of Ford and the Ontario" government "to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy"—that's the key focus of this petition, a national auto strategy—"and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector."

I adhere my name to this, and I shall pass it to Olivia.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's lack of priority funding is causing the closure of the South Bruce Grey Health Centre restorative care Chesley site as of May 1st, 2015; and

"Whereas in three years, the 10 beds dedicated to this program have seen over 300 patients utilize the program and at this time there is a waiting list for this successful program; and

"Whereas currently over 83% of patients are discharged from the restorative care program to home after a two- to eight-week program which has prepared them to confidently return home, recognizing this program increases their quality of life through the regaining of strength, balance and independence; and

"Whereas the closure of this program will deprive seniors and other eligible clients from the many health and mobility benefits that the restorative care program offers; and

"Whereas the alternative to the restorative care program will see patients staying in active medical beds longer, while they wait for long-term care; and

"Whereas the return of investment on the restorative care program far exceeds conventional approaches when considering the value of quality of life in the patients' own home as compared to a long-term-care facility; and

"Whereas it is our understanding that the CCAC has cut back its services enabling patients to remain confidently in their home;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the South Bruce Grey Health Centre restorative care Chesley site be recognized for its success; and for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to showcase this program as a model to be followed across the province; and

"That the closing of the South Bruce Grey Health Centre restorative care Chesley site on May 1st, 2015, not proceed and the provincial government support this health care model with base funding as an investment in the health and welfare of patients so they can confidently remain in their home."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my name and send it to the table with Carina.

SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILDREN

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: This petition is called "Maintain the John McGivney Children's Centre Preschool Program."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the John McGivney Children's Centre annually helps about 2,500 children with physical, neurological and developmental challenges;

"Whereas the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program is an exceptional program administered by expert faculty and staff that offers youth and their families a transformative experience that they would not receive in a less specialized setting;

"Whereas the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program faces a shortfall in provincial funding;

"Whereas families raising children with special needs incur increased costs for care which the income test does not properly reflect;

"Whereas compliance with the provincial requirements means that the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program is unable to be sustained;

"Whereas the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program closure will mean a loss of a valued skill set of expertise from teachers and support staff in our community that will leave some of the area's most vulnerable children and families without proper child care;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To make up any funding shortfalls that result from transitioning to a fee subsidy model so that the John McGivney Children's Centre preschool program can remain operational and consider changes to the income test to better reflect the increased costs families raising children with special needs incur."

I fully support this, sign my name and give it to page Samantha.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise today to read this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable

to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I agree with this petition. I will affix my name and send it to the table with page Madison.

1340

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease that causes thinking and memory impairment. Alzheimer's disease is progressive, worsens over time and will eventually lead to death;

"Whereas there are an estimated 208,000 Ontarians diagnosed with Alzheimer's and related dementia today, and that number is set to increase by 40% in the next 10 years;

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease creates emotional, social and economic burdens on the family and supports of those suffering with the disease—over 25% of those providing personal supports to survivors of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia are seniors;

"Whereas the total economic burden of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than \$770 million per year through to 2020; and

"Whereas Ontario's strategy for Alzheimer's disease and related dementia has not been revised since the implementation of a five-year strategy in 1999;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to immediately review, revise and implement an updated, research-informed, comprehensive strategy to respond to and prepare for the rapidly growing needs of those living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia."

I sign the petition and give it to page Mira for delivery.

LEGAL AID

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is a petition titled:

"Population-based legal services funding.

"Whereas Mississauga Community Legal Services provides free legal services to legal aid clients within a community of nearly 800,000 population; and

"Whereas legal services in communities like Toronto and Hamilton serve, per capita, fewer people living in poverty, are better staffed and better funded; and

"Whereas Mississauga and Brampton have made progress in having Ontario provide funding for human services on a fair and equitable, population-based model;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of the Attorney General revise the current distribution of allocated funds ... and adopt a population-based model, factoring in population growth rates to ensure Ontario funds are allocated in an efficient, fair and effective manner."

I support this petition, will put my name to it, and I will hand it to page Luca.

DENTAL CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from the people of my riding. It reads as follows:

"Whereas thousands of Ontarians live with pain and infection because they cannot afford dental care;

"Whereas the promised \$45-million dental fund under the Poverty Reduction Strategy excluded impoverished adults;

"Whereas the program was designed with rigid criteria so that most of the people in need do not qualify; and

"Whereas desperately needed dental care money went unspent and was diverted to other areas even though people are still suffering without access to dental care;

"We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To do all in its power to stop the dental fund from being diverted to support other programs; and

"To fully utilize the commissioned funding to provide dental care to those in need."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name and ask page Abdullah to bring it to the table.

STUDENT SAFETY

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I support this petition. I affix my name to it, and I give it to page Joshua.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from a constituent of mine, Linda Dupuis, in Val Caron. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the NDP MPP for Timiskaming-Cochrane, John Vanthof, has introduced Bill 46 in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario so that UTVs (utility task vehicles)

would be treated like all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) by the Highway Traffic Act...;

"Whereas this bill will have positive economic impact on clubs, manufacturers, dealers and rental shops and will boost revenues to communities promoting this outdoor activity;"

So they "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To vote in favour of MPP Vanthof's Bill 46 to allow UTVs the same access as ATVs in the Highway Traffic Act."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask good page Samantha to bring it to the Clerk.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas microbeads are tiny plastics less than one millimetre in diameter which pass through our water filtration systems and get into our rivers and the Great Lakes; and

"Whereas these microbeads represent a growing presence in our Great Lakes and are contributing to the plastic pollution of our freshwater lakes and rivers; and

"Whereas the scientific research and data collected to date has shown that microbeads that get into our water system collect toxins and organisms mistake these microbeads for food and these microbeads can move up our food chain;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Mandate the Ontario government to ban the creation and addition of microbeads to cosmetic products and all other related health and beauty products; and

"The Ministry of the Environment conduct an annual study of the Great Lakes analyzing the waters for the presence of microbeads."

It gives me great pleasure to affix my signature and give it to page Jae Min.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The time for petitions is over.

Pursuant to standing order 58(b), at the end of routine proceedings, the Speaker will recess the House until 4 p.m. Therefore, this House is recessed until 4 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1347 to 1600.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2015 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2015

Hon. Charles Sousa: I move, seconded by Ms. Wynne, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Sousa has moved, seconded by Ms. Wynne, that this House ap-

proves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Before we carry on, I would like to ask for the indulgence of the House, while the pages are delivering the documents, to provide them time to do so, and also remind you to please make sure the aisles are clear of any obstacles, including your hands, your feet and any other pieces of material you've brought with you.

I now have to give them permission to deliver said documents. I would ask the pages to deliver the documents, please.

Interjection: That's a record.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We'll see.

I am now instructed to ask if all members have received their copies.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I'd just like to take a moment to acknowledge my family. My wife, Zenny, is here; my brother, Julio; my son, Justin; and of course my dad, Antonio, who is always ever so popular. Thank you all for being here today.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to present the 2015 Ontario budget.

I want to thank my colleagues in this House. I also want to thank the many dedicated and talented public servants who worked on this budget: Deputy Minister of Finance Scott Thompson, Treasury Board Deputy Minister Greg Orensak, and Assistant Deputy Minister of Finance Chris Giannikos—and, of course, the tremendous staff in my office.

More importantly, I want to thank the many Ontarians who have actively participated in pre-budget meetings and in telephone town halls and who provided input through our Budget Talks website as well.

For generations, Mr. Speaker, governments have used budgets as a means to address our most pressing issues and lay out a course for our future.

Over our history, budgets have protected our people from the effects of economic recessions, to build up our infrastructure, to create jobs, and to secure a better future.

So, Mr. Speaker, this budget, like all budgets before it, is more than a report on government finances. It's about people. It's about competitiveness and compassion. It's about protecting, preserving and enhancing the quality of life of people all across this province.

This budget is not about ideology. It's not about partisanship.

It is a statement about where we want to go next, about what we will do next—together—as Ontarians, to build a stronger province.

We all want a better quality of life, for ourselves and for those we love.

That has been the story of Ontario: each generation striving to build a better society.

Ontario is one of the world's great success stories.

So today, Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present our government's plan to address the needs of Ontarians now and for tomorrow, working together for a strong and prosperous future.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is all about building Ontario up.

Monsieur le Président, le plan de notre gouvernement pour la création d'emplois et la croissance comprend quatre composantes.

Nous allons bâtir une infrastructure moderne, nous allons soutenir la formation professionnelle, nous allons contribuer à créer un climat d'affaires innovateur et dynamique, et nous assurerons la sécurité du revenu à la retraite.

Mr. Speaker, our government's plan to create jobs and growth has four major components.

We will build modern infrastructure. We will support skills training. We will help create a more innovative and dynamic business climate. And we will provide income security in retirement.

And, Mr. Speaker, this is a plan that will not only create a more competitive economy, but it will also help us build a fair society, with strong health care, and the tools to break the cycle of poverty and support people with disabilities.

And we will continue to move forward with our comprehensive plan to balance the budget by 2017-18.

Mr. Speaker, the ingenuity and creativity of individual Ontarians know no bounds.

I think of people like Banting and Best, who invented insulin and who continue to save lives today.

Or Dr. Emily Howard Stowe, the first woman to practise medicine in Canada—and a pioneer of women's rights, creating a pathway of equality for all.

Or Samuel McLaughlin, who helped create our auto industry, an industry in which Ontario continues to be a global leader.

Each of these people, and so many others, have made tremendous contributions to our culture, to our quality of life and to our economy.

But there have been times in our history, Mr. Speaker, when the challenges we faced have been beyond the power of one person to solve.

And on those occasions, we have always come together to work together.

To tackle our challenges together, so that we can continue to have growth and jobs.

Our history is steeped in examples of this.

In the 19th century, our country was founded, in part, through public investment in a national railway, linking Canada from east to west and helping to create a strong economy and a united Canada.

In the 20th century, Ontarians helped build the St. Lawrence Seaway—which helped us get our products to global markets, creating an economic boom.

In each of these cases, Canadians, working together, did what individuals working alone could not.

We invested in ourselves—building what was necessary to support a strong and growing economy—and rising to meet the challenges of the day.

Together, we built infrastructure that created jobs, generated growth and improved our quality of life.

1610

Today, as we compete in the 21st century, Ontario is facing other challenges.

Mr. Speaker, right now, the biggest barrier to jobs and growth in our province is—ironically—a by-product of our own success.

Ontario has a busy and competitive economy.

Our roads and our highways are filled with manufactured parts that need to get to just-in-time industries, goods that need to get to market quickly, and people who need to get to work quickly and safely—if we want to stay competitive.

We must invest.

Right now, gridlock is slowing our economy, gridlock is costing us jobs, and gridlock is choking our growth.

Mr. Speaker, this is not just a “Toronto traffic” problem.

Everyone—from Bowmanville to Brampton to Burlington—knows how hard it is to get across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area in rush hour.

The average commute time for a GTA resident is over an hour—and that's just one way. Too many people are stuck on expressways that look more and more like parking lots.

Commuting times in Ontario have risen 12% over the past two decades, and that's not just in Toronto—all across Ontario those commute times are rising.

The C.D. Howe Institute tells us that gridlock costs our economy up to \$11 billion per year in the GTHA alone.

Because, for decades, Ontario has not been building fast enough to keep up with the province's needs. Government after government has delayed critical investments.

Ontario cannot afford any more delays.

Ontario must build.

Mr. Speaker, the effect of this epic congestion in the GTHA echoes in the economies of communities like Windsor and North Bay and Kingston.

Because we are all connected.

And communities outside the GTHA have their own infrastructure needs as well.

So, just like we came together to build other projects in the past, we need to address the great challenge of our time.

Mr. Speaker, the very best thing we can do to make sure our economy continues to grow and produce jobs is to build the roads, is to build the bridges, is to build the transit that a 21st-century economy needs.

That's why we created the Trillium Trust, where we set aside funds earned from old assets that remain dedicated to be reinvested as necessary for new assets.

Public investments are important. But let's be clear. This is not about building more government. It's about building more opportunity.

We know that for every dollar we invest in infrastructure, we get \$1.60 back in economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, to support our growth—and to meet the challenges of our time—we have taken important steps to unlock the value of some of our provincial assets.

As you will recall, back in 2009, we took action at the height of the global recession to save the auto sector and to protect our economy.

That was the right decision at the time, and divesting those shares when the crisis had passed was also the right decision.

That earned Ontario \$1.35 billion—to now be used to further build up our province.

So, Mr. Speaker, we asked the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets—led by Ed Clark—to explore ways to maximize the value of provincial assets. I'm not sure if Mr. Edmund Clark is here today, but thank you so much, sir, for your contribution.

Unlocking value—as Canadians have done from time to time throughout our history—allows us to reinvest in critical public infrastructure and other essential infrastructure projects.

To enable these investments today and to create the conditions to realize stronger growth for tomorrow, the council was guided by three principles:

- protecting the public interest;
- maximizing value for Ontarians; and
- doing so in a transparent way.

We are adopting the council's key recommendations.

First, we're modernizing Ontario's distribution and sale of beer, improving choice while continuing to be socially responsible.

And for the first time in its history, Ontario will permit the sale of beer in grocery stores.

This, Mr. Speaker, is the largest shakeup since Prohibition in 1927—which I'm told was when Jim Bradley was just a rookie member in this House.

Second, Mr. Speaker, we're broadening the ownership of Hydro One through an initial public offering. This will strengthen Hydro One's long-term performance. It will unlock billions in value for the benefit of Ontarians, and it will do so while protecting the public interest.

Following the IPO, the people of Ontario will remain the largest shareholder. We're proposing that no one or group of shareholders will be permitted to own more than 10% of the company.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, the new Hydro One will not set rates for consumers. That will remain the job of the independent Ontario Energy Board.

By broadening ownership in Hydro One we'll make available billions of dollars to invest in the infrastructure that we need to fuel our economy.

We will invest the amount dedicated to the Moving Ontario Forward plan using funds realized from asset optimization, resulting in a new dedicated amount of \$31.5 billion over 10 years. That will be used for public transit and critical infrastructure right across the province.

We will further improve GO train service.

Our Regional Express Rail plan will mean more trains, more trips and faster service.

It will mean GO trains running every 15 minutes in core areas.

It will mean two-way, all-day service on weekdays, in the evening and on weekends in core areas where the need is greatest.

It will mean extending the GO network—making it faster and easier to get around.

As well, the Union Pearson Express will begin service this spring, moving people from downtown Toronto to Pearson airport faster than ever before.

The first phase of the Highway 407 East extension from Pickering to Oshawa will open later this year, again helping more people get home more quickly and more easily.

It will mean new infrastructure all across Ontario.

We will invest \$16 billion in the GTHA and \$15 billion more outside of the GTHA.

For example, we will be investing \$100 million a year to help communities like Burk's Falls and Penetanguishene build roads and bridges and create more jobs.

We are making highway improvements between communities, like Highway 11/17 between Thunder Bay and Nipigon, and Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph.

We will be improving connections within communities and between communities.

Allowing goods and people to move more freely and efficiently.

All of this supports a strong economy—with more jobs.

Mr. Speaker, our investments in roads and bridges and public transit are part of our long-term plan to build more than \$130 billion in infrastructure over 10 years. This is the largest infrastructure investment in Canada since driving the last spike to complete the Canadian railway in 1885.

This investment is the very best action we can take now to secure a greater future for our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, some parts of the world rely on lower labour costs as their competitive advantage.

Our competitive advantage is our talent, our education and our skills.

We know that a well-educated workforce is a competitive workforce.

And a competitive workforce leads to a stronger economy.

It starts at the very beginning.

Which is why today there are over 130,000 more Ontario children in licensed child care than in 2003.

It is why we've raised the wages of child care workers to attract, retain and reward them. It is why we've invested in full-day kindergarten. It is why we've lowered class sizes.

And it is why we're investing \$11 billion over 10 years to build new schools and refurbish older ones.

And our efforts are working.

Today, more kids are meeting or exceeding provincial standards.

More kids are graduating from high school.

And more adults have a post-secondary credential.

We're making it easier to pay for their college and university programs.

Last year, we provided more than \$1.3 billion in grants and loans. We helped more than 380,000 students achieve their dreams of a higher education.

Mr. Speaker, making sure more people have access to post-secondary education is essential to our growth agenda.

1620

That is why we are also supporting aboriginal institutes. We want to ensure that First Nations young people have access to high-quality education and training as well.

And we're investing in skilled trades to support more than 28,000 Ontarians who registered for apprenticeships last year.

For example, we're supporting Seneca College as it partners with Siemens Canada to train the next generation of technology workers. And I congratulate David Agnew, the president of Seneca College, for making this happen as well. Thank you.

I am proud to say that in this budget we're renewing Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy, with an additional \$250 million over two years.

That will bring our total investment in youth employment programs to more than \$565 million.

It will mean continued funding for programs to help young people get that first job, to find a mentor or start their own business. For example, the Youth Business Acceleration Program provides start-up funding and advice to innovative companies run by young people. This program has already created 980 jobs in Ontario.

Sunit Mohindroo and Ahmed Badruddin are young entrepreneurs who have benefited from this program. In 2011, they left Silicon Valley and returned to Ontario, where they grew up and went to school, to start WatrHub, an innovative company that has been recognized by the Globe and Mail, the Washington Post and CNN as one of the world's top innovations to address water challenges. Sunit is in the gallery with us today. Thank you for doing all the tremendous work you do.

Mr. Speaker, we also recognize the importance of apprenticeships. That is why we're supporting apprenticeships with an additional \$55 million to enhance in-class training and support programs.

Investing in people's skills ensures that we nurture the best talent for continued economic growth and success.

Mr. Speaker, the third part of our economic plan is to help create an environment where businesses can be more competitive.

Part of that includes better infrastructure and a skilled and talented workforce. Those are key priorities for business leaders when deciding where to invest and expand their operations, as are costs and taxes.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to maintain low corporate and small business tax rates.

Our combined corporate income tax rate is lower than the combined tax rate of any US state and it is lower than any of the G7 or G20 nations.

And we are getting results.

Ontario is now the number one destination of choice for foreign direct investment in all of North America, beating out California, Texas, New York and every province in Canada. That means more jobs, economic growth and a better standard of living for all of us.

But, Mr. Speaker, there's more to do.

That is why we launched our 10-year, \$2.5-billion Jobs and Prosperity Fund to partner with Ontario companies to increase productivity, to lead innovation and to boost our exports.

Under that program, Guelph auto parts maker Linamar Corp. received support for an investment of half a billion dollars that will create 1,200 new jobs over the next 10 years.

We're not stopping there.

That's why, in this budget, we will provide an additional \$200 million more to the Jobs and Prosperity Fund to attract even more business investment. And for the very first time, Mr. Speaker, we'll also make the forestry sector eligible for this support. We know that we must always look ahead. That's why we will establish a new innovation initiative which will bring together senior business leaders to find ways to scale up Ontario start-ups, like Ryerson University's Digital Media Zone, which has incubated more than 130 start-ups. They've raised over \$40 million in funding and created more than 1,200 jobs.

There are regional pressures as well, Mr. Speaker, right across the province. For example, we know that industries in the north have higher costs than in the south, with longer and colder winters to boot.

That is why we will also make the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program ongoing.

This ongoing annual investment of \$120 million will help Ontario's large northern industries reduce costs and make them more competitive.

It is critical to the success of our efforts to establish new industry in northern Ontario; for example, a smelter to support development in the Ring of Fire.

We are also continuing to support growth and innovation in Ontario's agri-food industry with initiatives that support farmers and producers.

Working together with the sector, we have already seen great progress.

Between 2013 and 2014, the agri-food sector created over 17,000 net new jobs. Total employment has risen to over 780,000, and exports increased by 5.5% to almost \$12.5 billion.

Mr. Speaker, we're helping businesses by also cutting red tape. Since 2008, we have eliminated 17% of all regulatory requirements. These were regulations that were getting in the way of the ability of people to grow their businesses.

We're also helping to create a Cooperative Capital Markets Regulatory System.

An initial handshake between Ontario, British Columbia and Canada has now attracted Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Yukon and Prince Edward Island to sign on.

This will strengthen Canada's capital markets by providing better protection for investors, enhancing Canada's financial services sector and managing risk in our financial markets.

The next steps in this new national endeavour will be announced later this year.

Ontario has also led the way with the establishment of the first renminbi, or RMB, trading hub; this is the first Chinese currency trading hub anywhere in North and South America.

The RMB is currently the second-most-used currency in global trade finance.

Authorized by China's central bank, this hub is exclusive to Canada and will allow Canadian banks to offer clients financial services and currency exchange more competitively than anywhere else.

In all, the RMB trading hub will further attract international business opportunities, trade and development. It's all happening right here in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing humanity. There are those who don't believe this. There are those who deny it, and it's time for the climate change deniers to wake up and smell the carbon.

Ontario is taking action. Ontario is putting a limit on the main sources of greenhouse gas pollution. We're doing so through a cap-and-trade system to protect the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the health of our children and grandchildren.

Ontario intends to join the cap-and-trade system under the Western Climate Initiative. Under the cap-and-trade system, businesses would have their own greenhouse gas quotas. They would be able to sell any unused portion they don't need when they then innovate and find ways to reduce emissions.

Good environmental policy is good economic policy. A cap-and-trade system creates an incentive to reduce our use of fossil fuels, and in turn creates an incentive to boost innovation, create jobs and ensure our prosperity for many, many years to come.

Our fourth pillar, Mr. Speaker, is ensuring that everyone has a secure retirement.

That's why we're introducing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Retirement security is a necessary part of keeping our economy strong.

The reward for a lifetime of contributing to that economy should not result in poverty.

Yet more than half of all Ontario workers do not have a workplace pension.

Too many are at risk of not saving enough.

Low retirement savings puts people and our entire economy at risk.

The Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, like health care and great schools, is another strategic advantage. It helps to attract and retain the talented workforce that businesses need.

So we are moving forward with the next steps needed to set up the ORPP administration corporation and the formation of an executive governing body. We are also introducing voluntary pooled registered pension plans as supplements.

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I wish to thank my colleague the Associate Minister of Finance, Mitzie Hunter, for the wonderful work she's done to bring enhanced retirement security. Thank you, Mitzie.

The ORPP and the PRPP will help sustain economic prosperity for years to come.

And we are doubling the Seniors Community Grant Program to \$2 million per year, giving seniors more opportunities to volunteer, learn and participate in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, we're strengthening these four economic pillars—not as an end in and of themselves.

We are doing all this because a strong economy helps us create a fair society.

A key to that fair society is our health care system.

Ontarians are as compassionate as we are competitive.

And our universal health system is proof of that.

Not only does it provide us with a way to care for all our citizens, but it provides us with a competitive advantage in the global economy.

That's why we're making it stronger.

Since 2003, we've hired 5,600 more doctors and 24,000 more nurses.

We've reduced wait times.

And 94% of Ontarians now have access to primary care.

And we're raising personal support worker salaries by \$4 per hour.

Now we're going to do even more.

We know that 30% of Ontarians will experience mental health or substance abuse issues in their lifetime.

And we know that 70% of these issues start in childhood.

So we're starting to tackle this issue by helping 50,000 kids and young people get mental health and addiction services.

These are changes that came about with all-party support, flowing from the recommendations of this legislative committee that worked well together in a positive and non-partisan way. I thank my colleagues across the floor for making this happen as well.

In this budget, we're acting. We're acting by investing \$138 million over three years for the next phase of our Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

As well, we will expand and improve on integrated home and community care while continuing to manage health costs.

Mr. Speaker, we remain committed to sustaining and improving Ontario's publicly funded health system. It remains an example to the world of professional, compassionate care.

Mr. Speaker, creating a fair society means making sure everyone has a chance to succeed.

Lifting people out of poverty makes sense, just as providing for our shared health care makes sense.

Because when we each succeed, we all succeed.

That's why, since 2003, we have committed more than \$4 billion to build new affordable housing units and repair existing ones.

That's why in 2014 we renewed our commitment to a five-year Poverty Reduction Strategy—which focuses on breaking the cycle by tackling the root causes of poverty.

By helping children and youth.

By helping people find meaningful jobs.

By committing to our bold goal of ending homelessness.

And by reforming social assistance to help more people transition to the workforce.

In 2013 and 2014, we raised social assistance rates for Ontario Works recipients, and we also did so for the people receiving Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. Today, we're announcing a third consecutive increase in social assistance.

This year, we also took steps to stop sexual violence and harassment and improve support for survivors.

To end the root causes of sexual violence, we introduced a new plan called It's Never Okay—causes such as unhealthy attitudes and behaviours, and gender inequality.

And, Mr. Speaker, through updated education and stronger workplace legislation, we will continue to change our province for the better—forever—by addressing an issue that has resisted change for far too long.

Because every Ontarian has a right to feel safe and respected.

Mr. Speaker, we can only have a society that is fair for all when we have sound management of Ontario's finances.

That's why our government works diligently and continues to surpass its fiscal targets year after year.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to meet our targets with determination—and discipline—working together with businesses and consumers, until we have achieved our goal of a balanced budget.

We are now projecting a deficit of \$8.5 billion in 2015–16. When achieved, it will be the lowest, in fact, since the onset of the global recession.

In 2016–17, we project a deficit of \$4.8 billion and a return to balance in 2017–18.

Ontario's diversified and resilient economy will help us reach that goal.

In 2015, the Ontario economy will lead the country with forecasted growth of 2.7%.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario has recovered all the jobs lost in the global recession and then some. Our economy has created a half a million net new jobs.

And three-quarters of these new jobs are in sectors that pay above-average wages.

More than 83% are in the private sector and 94% are full time.

Proof, Mr. Speaker, that our province is heading in the right direction.

Ontario's economy is expected to grow at a solid pace, boosted in part by a more competitive Canadian dollar, acceleration in the U.S. economy and lower oil prices.

While these are good signs, we are not relying on these factors alone.

Mr. Speaker, we have also held the line on spending.

2014–15 marks the sixth year in a row that program spending is expected to be lower than forecast.

In addition, over the past four years, the province has held average annual growth in program spending to 1.5%.

That is below the annual inflation rate. And we've done so without cutting critical services.

We are making every dollar count.

We did not control spending by slashing and burning, as some would do. We did it by closely examining programs.

Through the great work that is being done by my colleague Minister Matthews, the President of the Treasury Board, we have introduced a new multi-year planning and allocation process.

We are going line by line, looking at every single program and service that government delivers.

Every program is being examined with fresh eyes. As we go forward, we ask these questions:

Is it relevant? Is it effective? Is it efficient? And is it sustainable?

We're looking across government to achieve better value for your money.

And our approach is working.

We have the lowest rate of per capita program spending of any provincial government in Canada.

And we are achieving that while keeping health care, education and social services strong.

Still, we must hold the line.

For example, we have redesigned the youth justice system—there are now fewer youths in secure custody than in 2003. We're providing community-based programs for those lower-risk young people who have been in conflict with the law.

We've changed health care funding from a system that is based on the provider to a system that is based on the patient.

And that means we put people first, not the process.

And this coming year, we will do even more.

We will rework the ways in which we purchase, dispense and issue bills under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program. This will save Ontarians over \$200 million per year.

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We'll make our business tax support more focused and effective. That will save another \$165 million per year by 2017–18.

Mr. Speaker, we are holding the line on public sector compensation, as well. We're in this together to ensure we find savings to achieve net zeros because there is no new funding for compensation increases.

We have already had success with AMAPCEO, which represents our professional and managerial workers.

We are negotiating with all our partners to ensure that we continue to deliver strong public services while responsibly managing public sector compensation.

And Mr. Speaker, we will continue to make sure that all businesses meet their obligations, as well. This effort—by going after the tax avoiders—has so far generated \$600 million for the province this year.

In this budget, we are introducing new and better ways to continue to fight the underground economy and tax avoidance.

As an example, we will outlaw electronic sales suppression technology, commonly known as zappers, which allows some businesses to hide sales and underreport business income.

Nous regardons ce que le Québec a fait pour récupérer des millions de dollars du revenu de l'économie souterraine, et nous en tirons des leçons. Cela montre comment les deux provinces du Canada central travaillent ensemble d'apprendre l'une de l'autre au profit de toute la population.

We look to Quebec's ability to recover millions of dollars of revenue from the underground economy and we're learning from it. It is another example of the two provinces that make up central Canada working together and learning from each other for the benefit of all people.

Mr. Speaker, we will also celebrate the 400th anniversary of the francophone presence in Ontario this year.

Cet anniversaire marque le passage de Samuel de Champlain dans la province et met en relief le rôle important qu'ont joué les Franco-Ontariens dans l'histoire et le développement de notre province.

Our government has committed \$5.9 million towards communities all across the province to celebrate Franco-Ontarian culture. This will attract tourists, contribute to the economy and recognize our notable legacy.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier, Kathleen Wynne, again and again has shown strong leadership on the national stage on issues such as energy, interprovincial trade barriers, retirement security and climate change. Our Premier has stood up for Ontario and driven the national agenda.

Ontarians pay \$11 billion more to the federal government than we receive in federal transfers and services.

We've lived with this inequality in the equalization program for many years now.

Ontario is a proud partner in the federation and we believe in doing our part to keep our nation strong.

That said, Mr. Speaker, Ontario needs a strong partner in the federal government to strengthen our country and our economy.

The great economic challenge of our time is building infrastructure.

Provinces and territories invest 46 cents of every dollar spent on infrastructure, municipalities invest about 40 cents and the federal government—they invest just 14 cents.

Mr. Speaker, if the federal government wants a stronger Canada, it must invest its fair share in the critically important projects that strengthen Ontario's economy.

That also includes helping to develop the Ring of Fire to spur economic growth and create jobs.

Our government has committed to invest \$1 billion to build infrastructure, including transportation, in the region.

We need a federal partner in this initiative, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this summer we will host the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games.

The eyes of the world will be on Ontario.

This has been years in the making.

It will be the biggest multi-sport event ever held in Canada.

And we will welcome more than 10,000 athletes, coaches and officials from 41 countries to compete in 51 sports at more than 40 venues across Ontario.

It is one more way that we are building Ontario up.

The Games will attract hundreds of thousands of tourists from all around the world. It has helped create more than 26,000 new jobs, and it grows our GDP by \$3.7 billion.

It's going to be an exciting summer event.

And one that will provide housing, transportation, accessibility, and educational, sporting and recreational legacies for decades to come. Absolutely.

Please join me in welcoming Curt Harnett. He's an Olympic, Commonwealth and Pan Am gold medalist with a world record for cycling, and Canada's chef de mission for this year's Pan/Parapan American Games.

Mr. Speaker, he was a big part of making sure that we had an all-seasons velodrome in Milton that's going to make us all so very proud for many years to come.

I would also like to recognize two other athletes competing for Canada next month. First, Vincent Dallaire, from Wheelchair Basketball: He has been a member of Team Canada since 2014 and has been named to the team of Toronto 2015. Mr. Speaker, Vincent is from Quebec City, now living and training right here in Scarborough.

Also, please welcome Katrina Cameron, from the rhythmic gymnastics. She is a 2012 Olympian and a member of Canada's Pan Am team for Toronto 2015. Mr. Speaker, Katrina is from my hometown of Mississauga, Ontario.

Thank you to these wonderful athletes who join us in the gallery today. You and the entire Canadian team make us all so very proud. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, a budget is more than money.

Yes, it gives a summation of our finances, but it also expresses our aspirations for our future.

Our government is determined to build Ontario up.

To continue to create a competitive, modern economy that creates jobs and growth.

The best way to do this is to work together—as Ontarians—to build infrastructure that benefits all of us.

To do that, we'll have to do some things differently.

So that—together—we can build what we need for a strong future.

It's what Ontarians have always done.

We have always made these kinds of choices, together.

We have always had the courage to tackle tough challenges.

The confidence to seize new opportunities.

The clarity of vision to see what needs to be done.

Mr. Speaker, under the leadership of this Premier, Kathleen Wynne, our government is taking the bold steps necessary to secure our future.

Our Premier is a leader with the courage, the confidence, the energy and the clarity of vision which comes once in a generation.

Our Premier leads a government that believes in partnerships. By working together, we can accomplish anything.

That is why we are undertaking the biggest infrastructure build in Ontario's history.

With courage, with confidence, with clarity.

It is time, Mr. Speaker. It is time to build Ontario up. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. I move the adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville has moved adjournment of the debate.

Do we agree? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the House to revert back to introduction of bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Reverting back to introduction of bills: Do we agree? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUILDING ONTARIO UP ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2015
LOI DE 2015 POUR FAVORISER
L'ESSOR DE L'ONTARIO
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Sousa moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 91, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 91, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Sousa moves that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts, and that it now be read for the first time. Do we agree? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. Charles Sousa: No, I have no statement at this time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Do we agree? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, April 27, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1651.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglington–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Kiwalá, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
McDonnell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
		Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daïene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
		Premier / Première ministre
		Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

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Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
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Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
Laurie Scott, Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

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Monday 27 April 2015

Lundi 27 avril 2015



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 27 April 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 27 avril 2015

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

EARTHQUAKE IN NEPAL

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find unanimous consent in this House to observe a moment of silence for the victims of the earthquake in Nepal over the weekend and in condolence to many families of Nepali Ontarians who live in our province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent for all to rise and pay tribute in memory of the lost souls. Do we agree? Agreed.

I would ask all of us who can to please stand for a moment of silence in respect.

The House observed a moment's silence.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: On behalf of the leader of Her Majesty's official opposition, today we will have representatives from the Canadian Beverage Association who will join us shortly: Ron Soreanu, John O'Leary, Neil Antymis, John Challinor, Alison Bing, Jim Goetz, Brandon Ashmore, Carolyn Fell and Megan Boyle. We'd like to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It is my pleasure to introduce, from the great riding of Parkdale–High Park, Renee Mercuri and Joshua Tusin. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to welcome my partner, Jane Rounthwaite, to the Legislature today. She had an hour and she came in to watch question period.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to introduce and welcome Alexandra Robinson, who's now a PC Party intern. She's from St. Thomas, Ontario. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'm delighted to see that Joshua Osborne, a constituent from Newmarket–Aurora, is page captain today. With him are his mother, Jennifer Osborne, and father, Raymond Osborne, in the gallery. Welcome to them.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature students visiting from St. Mary's Catholic Secondary School, which is located in my riding of Davenport. The students have come from Quebec on an exchange program.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'm very pleased to introduce George Saarinen, vice-chair of the Lakehead District School Board. It's great to have you here, George is also on the executive of Unifor Local 229. Welcome, George.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Later in question period we will be joined by students from H.B. Beal Secondary School in my riding, with principal Michael Deeb. These are students from grades 9 to 12 who are with the Oneida, Chippewa and Munsee First Nations.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Joining us in the Legislature today are students from Victoria Park Collegiate Institute, my former school. I'd like to welcome them to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): With us today in the Speaker's gallery is the Right Honourable John Turner, 17th Prime Minister of Canada. Welcome to the House.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Our other guests will be suitably introduced shortly.

I do have one further announcement before the UC, which is that today we are having a—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): An introduction? The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: With your introduction of Mr. Turner, I noticed our good friend Mark Kierney is also in the House. I wanted to say welcome to the Legislature as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I was just going to say that the other guests will be suitably introduced shortly.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We do have one more thing: A note was slipped to me that the member from Brampton–Springdale is celebrating a birthday today. Happy birthday.

ERIC CUNNINGHAM

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Eric Cunningham, former member of this Legislature from the then riding of Wentworth North between 1975 and 1984, with representatives from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute to Eric Cunningham. Do we agree? Agreed.

I now turn to the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook.

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's an honour to rise in tribute to Eric Cunningham today, on behalf of the PC caucus. I bring greetings and welcome to his wife, Heather; daughter, Ashley; her husband, John, and of course, the Right Honourable John Turner, Prime Minister of Canada.

Eric Cunningham was a good man. He had impact, he made a difference and he was a fighter with each breath.

One thing I've learned in this business is that you never know who you learn a life lesson from. I remember that back in the early to mid-1990s—I sat in the back corner there—I was encountering these creatures called the Ontario Liberal Party. We had been through a recent battle, and I would say to my colleagues over there that it was a rather acrimonious time in the Legislature.

In one of my early meetings was another type of creature called a Liberal lobbyist. I was wondering exactly what this would be. It happened to be a gentleman named Eric Cunningham, a former Liberal MPP from down my way. We shared some of the same territory in my riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook and his in Hamilton—Wentworth. I didn't know exactly what I was in for, but here he was, a gentleman, a consummate professional and a lot more soft-spoken in person than you'd see in the assembly. He got the game; he played it well. He gave me good advice.

We had a few things in common, too, that were part of the conversation. He was a graduate of the University of Western Ontario, as am I. He, I think, was the youngest member elected to the assembly with his first win back in—1974?

Interjection: Seventy-five.

Mr. Tim Hudak: He was even younger in 1974.

I actually wasn't the youngest member elected in 1995. That honour belonged to John Baird, but I told Eric at the time that I was the most immature. But he understood.

1040

I think my colleagues like Jim Bradley and Monte Kwinter might be surprised by this: He actually ended up coming to my fundraisers as well when he had Melrose communications. But he got his point across. He knew how to do that. He understood the bounds that we lived within, as the PC government at the time, and he was highly effective in the work he did, because he was a professional. He cared deeply about the issues, particularly around the environment. I had a lot of respect for him. I can only imagine how much he's missed by my colleagues who knew him across the floor, let alone his family here today.

He came from that era before the cameras, so when the cameras were on, he was one fiery member of the Legislative Assembly. I think he thought that fighting Irishman from Notre Dame—he thought he was a little soft in his public portrayal. He stood up for his issues and fought for what he believed in, with passion.

I think he showed an incredible affection and belief in the philosophy of the Liberal Party when, after winning three straight elections, he decided to step aside from the provincial assembly to run for John Turner at the national level. That takes some doing. That takes some guts. I can tell what kind of impact he had with the federal Liberals to see the Prime Minister taking the time to be with us here today.

When he was in the assembly, he was a deep red. But the other part of his colours—he had a strong, strong streak of green. He always championed environmental initiatives. He was the environmental critic for a while. Clean water, clean air, parks, recreation areas—we owe a lot in the Hamilton area to what Eric Cunningham championed at the time. Of course, as well, working in the water industry made a difference in where the province went in the time ahead. I know colleagues in his party and the NDP will reflect the same thing that I heard.

His colleagues said he loved his constituents, and they loved him back. He engendered the respect of friends, colleagues and clients for his wisdom, his thoughtfulness and his integrity. He was a proud Canadian, and a loyal, faithful, dedicated member of the Liberal Party of Ontario and that of Canada. Some say he was the kind that would fight the unwinnable battles. He relished a good fight. But he had his share of victories, and sometimes it's the fight that's more important, at the end of the day, when you stand on principle. We thank him for it.

Sometimes bad things can happen to good people. That's a bitter irony of life. It's not so much accepting that fact as what you do about it. The sad irony is that much of Eric's later years after leaving the assembly were tied up in a legal battle, but he still fought for justice with his heart, with his family, and what he will leave behind. There's some justice in that some that gave his family, sadly to say, a bit of a living hell—they're now in jail. We stand in tribute to Eric Cunningham and what he stood for, his image and his legacy.

He was a good man, an incredible and successful politician, with great achievements in life. We stand today—and I'm proud, as a member of the PC Party—in respect for a member who sat opposite but was with us in actually making a huge difference for his community, for his environment and building bridges across the party.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute.

Mr. Paul Miller: For many of us, our only encounters with Eric Cunningham are the news articles that told us the stories of the challenges he faced over the last 12 to 15 years. At first glance, that may seem to be kind of tragic or unfair. But in many ways, this chapter of his life captures the essence of who Eric Cunningham was and why he was loved and respected by so many.

In fact, the qualities that served Eric well in that fight—his tenacity, sharp mind and his willingness to stand up for his convictions and fight for what he believed to be right, even in the face of daunting odds—were the tools he brought to the job as MPP and his many years of public service after resigning from Queen's Park.

I didn't have the privilege of knowing Eric Cunningham, but in reading up on him, and speaking with col-

leagues in preparation for today's tribute, it became clear that he would have been my kind of guy, party affiliation notwithstanding, of course.

I may not have had any contact with Eric over the years, but my uncle Bill Powell, the mayor of Hamilton, certainly did. My uncle only had good words to say about Eric.

The people of Hamilton like their politicians feisty, and Eric certainly filled that bill. His passion for the communities he served and the Liberal Party were intertwined. It would hardly be a stretch to say that he was fiercely partisan—even his obituary spoke of his dedication to the Liberal Party—but it was clear that he saw it as a platform to speak up for the people of Hamilton—Wentworth and Wentworth North. He was never one to shy away from a fight, even when he knew he might not win, if it was in the best interests of the people he had the privilege to represent.

As MPP, Eric was well regarded by his constituents, winning by increasingly comfortable margins during the course of his tenure here at Queen's Park. And in keeping with who he was, the decision to step down from provincial politics to run federally in the 1984 election was driven by his desire to be an effective voice for the community he was proud to call home.

Although the 1984 federal election didn't turn out the way he would have liked, it did not diminish his commitment to public service or the Liberal Party. Not only did he serve on a number of boards and commissions throughout the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, but he was also a willing and active mentor to the generation of Liberal MPPs who would follow in his footsteps. His legacy can be seen in the chamber in the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—another Hamiltonian, Mr. McMeekin, is there now—and the influence and impact he had had on other municipal and provincial representatives who had the privilege of knowing Eric.

To Eric's wife, Heather, daughter, Ashley, and son-in-law, John, thank you for being here today and for the opportunity to acknowledge Eric's contribution to our province. We stand with you in your time of loss.

Eric, on behalf of Andrea Horwath and the Ontario New Democrats, please accept our thanks for your many years of tireless service to Hamilton, Burlington and to the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm honoured to rise in the House and join the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook and the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek in paying tribute to a former member of this place, a mentor and a friend. In doing so I will share my time with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

On January 1 of this year, like many of you, I was saddened to learn of the death of former MPP Eric Cunningham, taken from us suddenly and far too soon. I'm pleased and proud that Eric's wife, Heather, his daughter, Ashley, and his son-in-law, John, are here with us today to hear from members of this place about his contributions to public life, his work on behalf of the people of

Wentworth North and his fierce commitment to the people of Ontario.

We are all honoured that the Right Honourable John N. Turner, our 17th Prime Minister, with whom Eric ran as a federal candidate in 1984, is here today. Mr. Turner, I know that Eric would be very proud and pleased that you are here. Eric respected you greatly. The two of you shared many things, among them your love, affection and respect for your mothers, both of them formidable. Said Eric when his mother, Estelle, died, "There may have been prejudices out there in the workplace to the advancement of females, but whatever barriers were put in my mother's way she moved them aside and never complained about it. She got things done."

Well, Mr. Speaker, the apple didn't fall far from the tree. Eric first ran for the Liberals federally in 1974, where at the age of 24 he lost a very close race to long-time Burlington MP the late Bill Kempling. The following year, Eric ran provincially and was elected in the riding of Wentworth North, one of the youngest MPPs, as the member opposite mentioned, ever elected to the Ontario Legislature. Eric was re-elected in 1977 and in 1981, resigning in 1984, as has been mentioned, to run federally for a second time. He then entered private life and worked as a public and government relations professional, doing things that he found meaningful and in support, always, of his community and the residents of it.

On a personal note, I was grateful to have Eric's support and assistance. I enjoyed our conversations. He was generous with his time and his advice. Eric was a man of principle and a tenacious seeker of justice, qualities which made him an excellent MPP and much loved by his constituents. His sense of humour and warmth made for easy conversations; I miss both.

To his wife, Heather, his daughter, Ashley, and his son-in-law, John, our deepest condolences.

I would now like to invite the minister, a close friend of Eric's, to share a few words.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: On December 30, I received an email from my good friend Eric Cunningham. He wanted to get together to discuss land acquisition issues related to his duties as a provincial appointee to the Hamilton Port Authority. Now, this was just one of many regular emails, calls or meetings I had with Eric. He was always busy advocating on a number of projects. I replied to Eric's email, suggesting we could get together sometime in mid-January. Sadly, that meeting never happened. Eric Cunningham passed away in the early morning hours of January 1.

1050

Eric served, as you've heard, as MPP for Wentworth North from 1975 to 1984. In 1984, while I was mission officer with the United Church of Canada, I took a sabbatical to work with Eric in his attempt to transition to federal politics. For three weeks, we canvassed side by side, and I specifically remember that, two days before the election, Eric turned to me—we were having a sandwich together—with a smile on his face and said, "You

know, Ted, we're going to lose this election big time." I asked him how he could smile, knowing the election was lost. He replied, "It doesn't matter. What matters is I had the opportunity to meet a lot of great people." That was Eric.

He was a giant when it came to politics. He gave people who were cynical and skeptical about politics something to believe in. He loved his work, and as the honourable Mr. Hudak has said, his constituents came to love him very much indeed.

Eric had the rare gift of being able to transform political enemies into friends. Since his return to the private sector, he constantly provided advice and wise counsel to many, including myself. We'd meet at least once a month to talk about every issue under the sun, but instead of simply pointing fingers, Eric always backed up his concerns with a potential solution. Needless to say, I respected him very much.

There are many stories I could share about Eric, but one recent event stands out for me. It involved a young girl suffering from cystic fibrosis who needed a new wonder drug that was not yet covered by OHIP—you may remember. The government was under pressure to approve the drug, and Eric said to me—I quote from an email he sent: "How can we justify paying for in vitro fertilization, smoking cessation products and liver transplants for people who have abused their bodies all their lives, but not be able to help this 12-year-old girl?" It was a question that needed to be asked. It spurred me to lobby my colleagues at Queen's Park to try to help this young lady.

Speaker, I miss Eric's friendship and wise counsel. Let me conclude with this final thought about my good friend Eric Cunningham. It is said you never pay your debt to the past until you have left a future indebted to yourself. Eric, you paid your debt to the past; the future is indeed indebted to you. We owe you big time, buddy. Rest in peace.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their heartfelt and very warm tributes to Eric Cunningham and to the family.

To the family: As is the tradition, we'll make hard copies of Hansard available and a visual presentation of what you heard today, on behalf of the Legislature. God bless. Thank you.

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to take a moment before we move to question period. Once again, I would like to address the House on the issue of the use of electronic devices in the chamber and in committees. I need to remind all members that our interpreters and transcriber staff who use headphones in their work have real difficulty when smart phones or any other devices vibrate on the members' desks. This sound is amplified and is not only disruptive to the work of these staff, but has an effect on their hearing. This is a health and safety issue that I must bring to your attention. For the sake of

the interpreters and the transcriber staff, the members need to take care not to have this happen at all.

I also ask the members to either turn off the vibrate function of their BlackBerrys or not put their BlackBerrys or any other vibrating-function material on their desks at all. Keep them on your person. It would be the best for us.

I also want to remind members that it's never permissible to take pictures from your devices or other ways in which we can now find ourselves able to take pictures—and I broaden that as much as I can to anticipate the future—here in the chamber or in committee, nor are any members to read directly from any of your devices when making presentations in the House.

I would appreciate deeply your co-operation on this issue. Thank you.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. As an homage to Mr. Cunningham's feistiness, I'll direct my question to the Premier.

With last week's budget, Premier, you could have done the right thing and changed the path you put us on. We've all stood here sharing stories of the pain you're inflicting on families throughout Ontario. We've also heard from the rating agencies, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and especially the Auditor General, all warning that you're headed in the wrong direction.

So what do you do? More of the same: more spending, more debt. You continue to use the province's credit card instead of a debit card. Premier, why do you continue to make it harder for Ontarians to pay their bills?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have a fundamental disagreement with the party opposite, a party that ran on a plan to begin by cutting and slashing across government. We said from the beginning that that was not our intention. We said that we were going to build this province up. We said we were going to make investments, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are investing in infrastructure. We are investing in transit and roads and bridges. We are investing in people's futures in terms of their skill development and youth employment. We know that if we don't make those investments now, we will not have that economic future of which we're capable.

I understand that the party opposite doesn't support that philosophy, doesn't support the fact that we need to build the province up and at the same time eliminate the deficit.

We're on track to do that. We've beaten our targets every year. We're going to continue to do this in a balanced and moderate way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, your budget isn't just more of the same. In many instances, it's actually a re-announcement from last year. Take that investment in infrastructure you just spoke of. It was actually word for word in last year's budget, except last year you only needed \$3 billion from asset sales to make it work. Now it needs the sale of the GM shares, \$9 billion from the sale of Hydro One, the LCBO headquarters and the OPG building. It suddenly needs all those now to make it work.

You're selling public assets to pay for what was already budgeted. It's a shell game. You're really using the money from the sale of Hydro One to reduce your deficit. And without the hydro revenue, you are going to be increasing hydro rates to pay off the mortgage.

Premier, why do you continue to increase our hydro bills to pay for your mistakes?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just take on a couple of the aspects of what the member opposite has said, both of which are not accurate. The fact is that we are committed to and were committed to—we ran in the election and we put in our budget last year that we were going to review the assets of this province that were owned by the people of Ontario to make sure that we could leverage them to invest in the assets that are needed today. Those dollars that we will realize through the opening of the ownership of Hydro One will go into transit and the transportation infrastructure that is much needed in this province.

I would say to the member opposite that he is a member of a party that sold the 407 in a fire sale that assured no investment for the people of Ontario, that put no controls in place in terms of the ongoing regulation of that asset, all of which are a model of how not to do it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, the reviews on your budget are in, and they're not pretty. Moody's offered two words: "considerable risk." Others are claiming a "deteriorating fiscal position." Another said it was "lacking in detail."

The worst thing was your chart on page 199. It's the same fake chart that was disclosed in the Legislature last year, the fake chart where your own ministry says the fake numbers were "never a real expectation" and it was "a deliberate policy." They were "notional targets," and there were no plans to deliver on them. You used the chart again. You guys couldn't even make up a new fake chart.

Premier, why do you continue to use these fake numbers that make it so difficult for families in Ontario?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, you know, it's interesting, because what gets said here in the Legislature isn't necessarily what gets said back at home. So the real numbers—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Leeds–Grenville, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that we are using are numbers that the member opposite used apparently—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Right after I admonish, you carry on. Second time.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: "Fake" should be withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Etobicoke North will come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This is a general pattern. Apparently on April 20 of this year, so very, very recently, the member for Nipissing, talking about health grants awarded—"Three local health organizations will receive a total of \$46,400 in one-time funding for the 2014-15 funding year."

"The funds, recently announced by Nipissing MPP Vic Fedeli, will go toward mental health and replacement reserve costs associated with supportive housing services in Nipissing."

The member opposite knows full well—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Stormont, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that if we are going to have a healthy society, we have to make investments to support people and support communities. He's happy about that in North Bay; I think he should understand that that starts here.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question? The member from Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: To the Premier: Please don't add those people to the 94 health care workers, including nurses, you've already fired in North Bay.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Last week, when asked about the budget, the Premier said, "We don't believe right now that taking more money out of people's pockets would be responsible." I was in the lock-up. I spent seven hours reading the budget. I don't know if the Premier read her own budget if she thinks it isn't filled with schemes to take more money out of people's pockets. The budget included a payroll tax, a cap-and-trade tax on everything, a beer tax, another installment on the aviation fuel tax, increased user fees and increased hydro rates.

Premier, which of those isn't taking more money out of people's pockets?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite needs to decide what his line of argument is. He needs to decide whether he believes that it's important that we make investments like infrastructure—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And when I sit it will stay that way.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —like infrastructure, like transit, like roads and bridges, like health care, or whether he believes that we should just go straight on—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Stormont, come to order; second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and we should slash across government and eliminate the deficit sooner than 2017-18, which is what we're on track to do.

Or the third option is, he could look at the complexity of the problems that we are confronting as a society. He could understand that we are in a transition in this province in terms of our economy and that we need to create a business climate that helps businesses to locate here and helps them to expand. He would then understand that we need to make those investments in infrastructure that will allow communities to thrive. That is the third path. We're happy to have his—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, our caucus had five budget asks designed to make life better for the people of Ontario:

—stop your payroll taxes that will put a burden on business and cost us jobs;

—don't adopt your cap-and-trade tax as it hurts families by putting a tax on everything;

—fix home care by reducing the number of agencies patients must deal with;

—make hydro more affordable, as it's chasing away business and causing families to choose between food and fuel, whether to heat or eat; and

—we asked you to present a serious, credible, detailed plan to balance the budget.

You chose to ignore this advice and continue with your tax-and-spend schemes. Premier, will you admit your budget will make it harder for Ontarians to pay their bills?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just be clear with the member opposite—and just to look at what he is saying in terms of those asks. He's saying, "Don't deal with climate change. Don't do our part." He's saying, "Spend more on health care." He's saying, "Don't make the investments in transit and transportation infrastructure that we need to make." He's not acknowledging that we are in fact on track to eliminate the deficit.

I'll read from what Don Drummond said. I know that Don Drummond is someone the party opposite has quoted many, many times. Here's what he said: "The 2015 budget's plan to restore fiscal balance by 2017-18 is credible ... The 2012 commission saw tremendous potential for extracting savings while maintaining and even improving the quality of services by changing the way they were being delivered. The budget offers many examples of commission recommendations the government is following."

I would think he could sign up for that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Like most MPPs, I too was home this past weekend. I ran into a guy I know who has owned a manufacturing shop in North Bay for years. He told me that if things don't pick up, he's going to close and leave the province for other work.

At a community dinner, a municipal councillor said to me, "Vic, it's like the air is coming out of our economy."

At a function yesterday, a woman who moved to BC said she's been following—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Finance.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —what's happening in Ontario and can't believe what has happened—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Second time, Minister of Finance.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —to our province.

Premier, this is what people are feeling all across Ontario. Taxes are going up all around them. Hydro rates continue to skyrocket.

Premier, when people are suffering all around you, why do you continue to take more out of their pockets?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite ran on a plan to fire 100,000 people as their first action. But I would say to the member opposite, I take from what he said that he would be very supportive of the fact that we have made permanent the northern industrial energy rate plan. I would take that he takes as positive and supports the notion of expanding and adding to our Jobs and Prosperity Fund and making the forestry industry eligible for those funds, and that he would understand we're doing that because we recognize that forestry is coming back but that we need to partner with forestry businesses to make sure they have a future in northern Ontario.

I think that if he is concerned about manufacturing and jobs in the north, he would be very supportive of those initiatives, all of which are included in our budget.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier insists the only way to invest in transit and transportation is to sell off Hydro One. It's just not true. Selling Hydro One funds less than 3% of the Liberal transit and infrastructure promise. Yet again, the Premier is making the wrong choice and families will pay the price. The Premier is busily selling the foolish notion to Ontarians that the only way to have infrastructure is to sell a strategic asset that makes them money each and every year.

Does the Premier actually believe her own spin?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here is what I believe: If we do not make the investments in transportation and transit infrastructure needed now, if we don't start those investments now, in fact continue on the work that we have been doing since 2003 and make that ongoing, then we will not have the infrastructure that is needed in order for our economy to grow.

Now, I understand that the leader of the third party is going to be doing a tour of the province, and she's going to be talking in communities about the plan that we have put on the table. I hope that in those same speeches she explains how she would build transit and how she would build transportation infrastructure without making the decisions that we are making, because so far, she ran on the plan that we ran on, and she hasn't put any alternatives forward. So I look forward to her explanation.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Perhaps the Premier should listen up. The Premier said she needs to find \$400 million per year. At most, that's 3% of what's needed for her promises. But she will not close HST loopholes that give away nearly billions annually. She will not end the waste that happens with P3s—billions of dollars. She brags about Ontario's combined corporate tax rate being less than that of Alabama, but she won't look at that either. She seems to think the only answer is to sell off Hydro One. It's the wrong decision.

Can the Premier explain why Ontarians should pay the price for another one of her wrong decisions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The fact is that we are doing a number of things, and the member opposite knows full well that we are pulling on a number of levers in order to have the resources. We are raising taxes. In fact, in the last two budgets we have raised taxes on individuals at the upper end of the income scale. We have raised taxes on jet fuel. We have apportioned a portion of the HST and gas tax to invest in transit and transportation infrastructure.

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The fact is, we cannot borrow endlessly. That is what the NDP would like to see. They would like to see us just rack up debt, and they don't want to work with the private sector. The leader of the third party has said she doesn't trust the private sector on anything. We trust the private sector to create jobs. We trust the private sector to work in partnership with us. We know if we don't make investments today we won't have a thriving economy tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The fact of the matter is, this Premier does not have a mandate to sell off hydro, and she does not need to sell off Hydro One. Selling off Hydro One is wrong for families. It is wrong for Ontario. Once it is gone, it is gone forever. There are no do-overs when it comes to the sell-off of Hydro One.

The Premier has no mandate. She has no good reason to sell off Hydro One. Can she explain exactly why it is that she's choosing to do so?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me go over this again because I know this is something we're going to need to talk about over the coming weeks, because it's a complex issue.

The fact is, we have assets in this province that we have built up over years. They were assets that were needed in the 20th century and the 19th century, and we need to make sure that we have the assets that are needed in the 21st century.

What Ed Clark and his group have said to us is, "You know what? Take that asset that was built up years ago, retain ownership of 40% of that asset, but use the income you can get from the other portion of that asset to invest in infrastructure that's needed today."

But what we said was, we have to have some controls in place. The regulatory regime, the price-setting regime, those remain in place, as well as de facto control of the board. The member opposite neglects those parts of this plan.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier.

The Liberals still have not learned right from wrong, and it's families that are going to be paying the price.

The Premier and her friends don't seem to have any problem finding billions to pay for corruption and scandal, but when it comes to paying for much-needed transit and transportation, they're making the wrong decision again. Selling off hydro isn't maximizing. It's not repurposing. It's not optimizing. It is a fire sale, plain and simple. Will the Premier just pull the plug today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Selling off the 407 was a fire sale. That was the model we looked at and we said, "We're not doing that. There's no way we're going to sell an asset and rob the people of Ontario of any future value. There's no way we're going to undervalue an asset and sell it off."

We're doing it in a very, very thoughtful way. We understand that the investment in infrastructure—roads and bridges—and transit is critical. If we don't do that, then we will not have the thriving economy we know we're all capable of. We've put those protections in place, and we are going to make—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Much better.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Selling Hydro One is wrong, and the people of this province will pay the price. It is going to kill jobs. It is going to hurt families. It pays for less than 3% of what's needed for her transit promises. Once the Liberals start Ontario down this road, there is no going back.

Will the Premier do the right thing by the people of this province and pull the plug on this wrong-headed plan?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's very interesting that the party of labour is at odds with the labour that works for Hydro One. The Power Workers' Union supports keeping the company together. That's how they see the strong jobs continuing.

I say to the member opposite, we are making a difficult decision. I will give it to her that it is a difficult deci-

sion, but we're making a decision that's not ideological. We're looking at the problem. The problem is, we need funds to invest in transit and transportation infrastructure. We need that money immediately because if we don't make those investments, we are not going to be able to have that infrastructure in place for the people of Ontario. We are not tied by an ideology that says, "Never change; never do anything differently; never learn from the past." We're doing all those things and we're making these investments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier is selling off Hydro One, but she won't even say the words. It's not optimization, it's not unlocking value, it's not maximization. So let's finish with a really basic question: If the Premier is so convinced that it's what Ontarians want and if she is so proud to do what even Mike Harris wouldn't dare to do, why is she embarrassed to use the words "selling Hydro One" and "privatizing Hydro One"?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I talked to people over the weekend and I said, yes, we are going to open the ownership, broaden the ownership. That means we're going to sell off in tranches. We're going to put out a 15% sale to start out with to see what the market is. We're going to do this in a very, very careful way. No single entity will own more than 10%. The government will retain control of 40%, and there will be protection of the regulation of the electricity system and the regulation of price controls—those will remain in place.

We've been very thoughtful about this. It's a difficult decision, but you know what's more difficult? Imagining a future in this province without the investments in infrastructure that are necessary.

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Education.

Minister, 5,000 more students are not in the classroom today. Students in the Rainbow board join their fellow students in Durham, wanting to learn and wanting to get back to school. That's 5,000 more families worried about their children.

Ontarians can't afford your lack of leadership any longer. This is clearly not a local issue, as you insist it is. This boils down to your years of fiscal mismanagement over a decade—12 years you've been in power.

Minister, will you get these students back in the classroom and give them the education they deserve?

Hon. Liz Sandals: We believe firmly in negotiated collective agreements. That means that we need to be negotiating collective agreements at the central table. I want to assure the member that in fact, we continue to work with the mediator and we continue to work at negotiating at the central table, because we understand that the only way we're ever going to resolve this is to get local agreements.

Now, I also understand that both school boards, the Durham board and the Rainbow board, have been very, very clear that they are available to negotiate at the local level. I would very much encourage the local unions to get back to the local table as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Minister, think about a grade 12 student in a calculus class. How will they be prepared for a university math class next year? Ontario students can't afford to be out of the classroom. They can't afford your lack of leadership.

Board by board, more children will be hurt, and you are causing nothing but damage to their educational experience. Students are now suffering—and I say it again, Mr. Speaker—because of your years and years of fiscal mismanagement.

Minister, how many more boards need to strike before you show leadership and stop blaming local issues?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm not quite sure what the member thinks we can do other than negotiate, but what I do know is what their suggestion was. Their platform was that they were going to fire 100,000 public servants. When we did the math, that worked out to 22,700 workers in Ontario school boards. That was their platform. I don't think that would get you labour peace, firing 22,700 people. I actually think the way to get labour peace is to negotiate collective agreements.

I also believe this is something that we need to do both locally—I understand that the boards are willing to be at the table—and centrally. I assure you that central negotiations continue.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. The Premier wants to hide behind the words "optimization" and "rationalization," but she won't out and out say it—that she's selling Hydro One to Bay Street for a quick buck. That's what you're doing, Premier.

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Privatization is a big deal. It will completely change our hydro system. Once the Premier sells Hydro One, there is no going back. But the Premier kept Ontarians in the dark last summer about her plans. Why did the Premier keep Ontarians in the dark about her plans to sell Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, the member opposite knows full well that we ran on a plan to review the assets of this province. We were very clear about it. We were clear about it in our platform—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We were clear about it in our budget, and people knew that Ed Clark was going to be leading that process.

The member opposite lives in a riding where people very much understand the need to invest in transit, and they understand the needs because they are seeing the congestion in their own communities.

So I would say to the member opposite: What would your plan be? Because the fact is that you ran on the plan that we put forward, and the fact is that you are now saying you don't go for that plan, but you haven't presented an alternative.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: You don't sell your house to build a fence around your property.

But going back to keeping people in the dark: The Premier is pushing the Ontario Ombudsman out of Hydro One. She's pulling the drapes on the sunshine list. She's ending freedom of information at Hydro One. She's getting rid of transparency from the Financial Accountability Office.

The Premier didn't run on this plan. She doesn't have a mandate to privatize Hydro One, and now she's making it less transparent and less accountable. This is the wrong decision. This is the wrong decision, and Ontarians will pay the price. Why did the Premier say "maximizing value of hydro," when she really was planning to sell hydro?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In terms of what we had put in front of the people of Ontario, let me just quote from the May 2014 budget—not the one that started with "As I was saying"—

Hon. Charles Sousa: The first one.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The first one. On page 20 it said, "The government will look at maximizing and unlocking value from assets it currently holds, including real estate holdings as well as crown corporations such as Ontario Power Generation, Hydro One and the Liquor Control Board." We ran on that.

Then, our platform said, "Our Moving Ontario Forward plan includes a balanced and responsible approach to paying for these investments. The funds will be from dedicated sources of revenue ... asset optimization: \$3.15 billion or 10.9%...." That's what we ran on, and that's what we're doing.

LA FRANCOPHONIE

M. Yvan Baker: Ma question est pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. Ministre, vous savez que je suis fier de vivre dans une circonscription où il y a une communauté francophone qui est croissante. Il y a un ou deux mois, j'ai eu le privilège d'atteindre l'ouverture, le commencement, de la construction d'une école francophone dans ma communauté. Alors, je suis très fier de ça.

Ministre, en décembre dernier, le gouvernement a annoncé le Programme Célébrations du 400^e de l'Ontario. Ce programme avait pour but d'aider les célébrations du 400^e anniversaire de la présence française en Ontario. En effet, cela fait maintenant 400 ans que l'explorateur Samuel de Champlain a visité l'Ontario. C'est donc un moment historique et important à célébrer.

Pouvez-vous nous mettre à jour à propos de ces activités et de ce dossier?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je suis très impressionnée de la qualité du français de mon collègue d'Etobicoke-Centre.

Alors, oui, la semaine dernière, nous avons eu le plaisir d'annoncer un financement pour 62 projets soumis, pour un total de 1,4 million de dollars. Vous vous souviendrez qu'en décembre dernier, la première ministre avait annoncé à Sudbury une enveloppe pour la célébration des fêtes.

En effet, nous avons lancé le Programme Célébrations du 400^e de l'Ontario en décembre dernier pour aider les organisations et les municipalités à célébrer ce grand événement. Je suis heureuse de rapporter que nous avons reçu un total de 110 applications. Nous les avons évaluées en regardant, entre autres, la nature et l'étendue du projet, ses retombées économiques, l'attrait de touristes ici en Ontario et le budget du projet.

Je voulais dire au membre de Nipissing que sa communauté va recevoir presque 50 000 \$ pour célébrer les fêtes du 400^e.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci.
Supplementary?

M. Yvan Baker: Merci, madame la Ministre. Je vous remercie pour votre enthousiasme à propos de ce sujet. Je suis fier de faire partie d'une province où on sait reconnaître la richesse de notre diversité et qui va honorer, cette année, la richesse francophone de ses racines.

Ministre, je vous ai entendu mentionner qu'il y avait 62 projets approuvés. Pouvez-vous partager plus de détails avec cette Chambre?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Dans l'enveloppe de 1,4 million de dollars, il y a 62 projets qui sont répartis un peu partout dans la province. Il y a 21 dans le centre de l'Ontario, 23 dans l'est, 13 dans le nord et cinq dans l'ouest de l'Ontario.

Ces projets sont diversifiés et organisés par des groupes francophones, francophiles, anglophones, des Premières Nations et des nouveaux arrivants. Ils prendront plusieurs formes, telles que des conférences, des colloques, des expositions d'art, des galas, des pièces de théâtre, des festivals et des salons du livre.

Ce qu'il faut se rappeler, monsieur le Président, c'est que tous les projets sont ouverts et inclusifs. J'invite tous les membres de cette Assemblée à y participer.

D'ailleurs, la longue fin de semaine d'août, il y aura une grande célébration à Penetang. On reproduira les fêtes du 300^e anniversaire qui avaient lieu en 1921. On avait fêté le 300^e. Pourquoi pas en 1915? Parce qu'on était en pleine guerre. Alors, on va reproduire l'événement du 300^e lors du 400^e.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier.

Premier, last week, just one day after your budget, Goodyear announced that it would shutter a \$500-million plant expansion in Napanee. Their explanation was simple: The soaring costs and the unreliability of electricity has made it too risky to invest in Ontario.

Instead, they have chosen, like so many other manufacturers, Mexico over the Wynne Ontario. That's 1,000

new jobs and half a billion dollars in investment leaving Ontario.

Premier, will you finally admit that your failed economic policies and hydro policies are driving jobs, prosperity and investment out of our province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member opposite that it's an interesting commentary, given that we are the number one jurisdiction for foreign direct investment at this moment and that we've seen \$4 billion worth of investment in the auto sector over the last six months. That's not to say that there isn't more to do. I completely understand that.

Whenever there's a plant that shuts down and there are jobs that are lost, Mr. Speaker, that's very, very hard on a community; it's hard on individuals; it's hard on a family. But we have to continue to work with businesses to bring them here to create the environment—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —a reliable energy system, which the member opposite will remember, in 2003 we did not have a reliable electricity system—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville is warned.

A one-sentence wrap-up, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We needed to rebuild the electricity system that we inherited in 2003. We've done that, Mr. Speaker. It is reliable.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, I think the Premier's math and stats teachers must have been on strike, as well, in her final year.

Goodyear has spoken with Hydro One and your government for months on end, Premier, to find a solution to your unreliable electricity system. It's now clear your government has not found a solution and, instead, has driven another world-class business, another \$500-million investment, another 1,000 new jobs out of our province.

You speak constantly about the investments you are making, but clearly the private sector doesn't believe you. They are speaking and voting with their feet and their wallets, and investing capital and jobs anywhere but Ontario.

Premier, it's time to be honest and to come clean with the people of Ontario. When and how will you fix your broken hydro system?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, the operations that the member is speaking about are not closing—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings—second time.

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Hon. Charles Sousa: In fact, they're not expanding, as well. And that's the issue: We need to find more ways to incite and encourage companies to invest in Ontario.

That is why the member opposite should support the budget that we brought forward. It talks a lot about how we can provide for greater incentives for companies to invest in Ontario. In fact, the minister responsible for economic development and trade is now at the Great Lakes Region talking about the things that Ontario does to provide for greater exports and greater manufacturing.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings is warned.

Wrap up.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As a result, we've increased the Jobs and Prosperity Fund by another \$200 million to create those incentives, and we have created now over half a million net new jobs in the province of Ontario since the recession, including in regions that the member talks about. We will continue to support industry.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark will come to order.

New question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Today, secondary school teachers in northern Ontario's Rainbow District School Board joined Durham teachers in standing up to this government's plan to force school closures, cut education and flip-flop on its commitment to keep class sizes manageable. Last week, elementary school teachers announced that they will be in a legal strike position on May 10.

While this government continues to dodge responsibility for mishandling our educational sector, an estimated 26,000 students are missing class and 2,400 teachers are now on the picket line. With teachers on strike, students out of school and parents across Ontario wondering whether or not their high school seniors will be going off to college or university this fall, will the Premier finally take responsibility for her government's cuts to education?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I must say the NDP is nothing if not persistent. They really do have trouble with the definition of the word "cut." So let me say once again, if you had \$22.5 billion in education funding last year, and you have \$22.5 billion in education funding this year, that is not a cut. That is stable funding—and less students, so it's actually more per student.

But I want to talk about some of the capital, because the accusation is that somehow we've been stingy with capital money. We have invested \$12.9 billion in school infrastructure since 2003. We have constructed 725 new schools, and more than 700 additions and renovations. We've put aside \$750 million for school consolidations and we've doubled the funding for school renewals.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Speaker, again to the Premier: The Liberal government continues to deny any cuts to education in Ontario. Along with ignoring inflation, last week this government actually announced their plans to spend \$248 million less in education in 2014-15 than it had originally promised. That is nearly a \$250-million in-year cut to education this year alone. All the while, the Liberals are telling Ontario families that education funding in this province is stable. If a freeze isn't a cut, and a cut isn't a cut, can the Premier please explain what she thinks is a cut to funding?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'd be quite happy to explain what happened, because in fact there is an impact of having declining enrolment. That means that we need to spend less money for more students. What that's actually allowed us to do is to reinvest in the students who are there. As I've said hundreds of times, I think, we don't believe in investing in empty space. We believe in investing in the students who are actually there. So what we have done is actually increased—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Liz Sandals: So what has actually happened this year, Speaker, is that in fact we are just flowing the same amount of money as in last year's GSN, but what it means is that we are spending more money per pupil. And that is true in both Durham—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Ma question s'adresse au ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels.

Minister, since 2003, Ontario's crime rate has dropped by 37% and the violent crime rate has dropped by 27%. Despite this, in many communities across our province, the cost of policing continues to rise. Part of the reason for this is because many individuals and families are confronted with issues that require broader solutions than a simple emergency response. I see this in my own riding of Burlington, where we are ably served by the Halton Regional Police Service.

Problems like elder abuse, domestic violence and addiction need a comprehensive strategy to address their root cause. As a result, it is incumbent on our province to help communities find solutions to problems that confront them in order to reduce the costs of emergency services and ultimately produce lasting results.

Mr. Speaker, through you: Can the minister please explain what solution he proposes to better address the social issues that confront municipalities and front-line responders in order to reduce the demand on emergency services?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the member from Burlington for asking a very important question in this House today.

Speaker, as we work to build stronger, safer and healthier communities right across Ontario, one of the

key challenges is how to address social issues at their root; in other words, addressing chronic issues in our communities.

Often, we think of our response to crime, safety and health emergencies in terms of police, fire and paramedics. These services are extremely important, but we also need to look at proactive community engagement to address the causes of social issues and reduce the cost of emergency responses in our communities. To do this, Speaker, we must bring a variety of groups to the table. That is the aim of our community safety hub model. A community safety hub would be made up of community and social service providers from fields such as health care, education, addiction, policing, probation and justice workers, children's services and First Nations issues. These team members would work together and find collaborative approaches to solve issues in the community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Minister, for that response.

Residents in my riding are pleased to see that you are proposing a model for community safety that will serve to better address social issues, not just in my community of Burlington, but right across our province. This could also help reduce the number of calls for emergency services, which will play an important part in containing costs.

But if the hub model is being proposed by the province, it risks becoming a one-size-fits-all solution, which would ultimately be ineffective. Without bringing together the right team of community members to address the wide variety of social issues confronting individuals and families in our province, it would be impossible to create lasting improvements. After all, the social issues that members of my community face are not the same as the ones that confront different communities across our province.

Mr. Speaker, through you: Can the minister please explain to the Legislature how the hub model will be effective across the province with Ontarians facing such a wide variety of issues?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The member raises a very important point. That's the incredible thing about community safety hubs: In order for them to be effective, they have to be developed by the individual communities so that issues confronting them are front and centre as being set by them. I'm pleased to say that this approach is already working in our communities across the province.

Most recently, as the Speaker would know, Brantford initiated a hub within its community as well.

In fact, the Gateway Hub in Nipissing was recognized recently by the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association for its innovative approach to building a safer and healthier community. Partners in Nipissing's Gateway Hub are working together in the community to identify high-risk individuals or families and helping them to achieve healthier and safer lifestyles. This will lead to lasting outcomes while reducing the demand on emergency services.

We are working with other ministries, as well, to make sure these hubs work effectively across the province.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. Premier, 140,000 new patients enter Ontario's health care system every year. More patients means more resources are needed. Your minister has said time and again, "We are ... and will be, increasing our funding to health care...." Yet when the federal Conservatives increased their health transfer by \$652 million, you put only \$598 million of that into health care.

Premier, can you tell the people of Ontario where 54 million health care dollars were funnelled?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite knows, having looked at the budget, that our health care expenditures for this year, next year and following years will be increasing. They will be increasing, in part, to reflect the growing population and the changing demographics of this province, but they will be increasing to allow us to invest in those important areas where we need to; for example, in home and community care, where we made the commitment a couple of years ago, in fact in 2013, that we would increase by 5% each year the investments in home and community care. We have been doing that for a number of years. We're continuing to do that into the future as well.

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I think the member opposite will appreciate some of the comments from our stakeholders—and I'd be happy to reference some of those in the supplementary—in terms of their reflections on the investments that we're making, as detailed in the budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'll try back to the Premier again, Mr. Speaker.

You love to bash the federal government, but when they pull through, you can't admit it.

Your current funding levels have already resulted in nurses being fired, services being shut down and CCACs turning away patients. This cut of \$54 million from your health budget is the equivalent of 9,000 long-term-care beds, home care for 28,000 patients or 7,000 new nurses.

The people of Ontario can't afford your cuts to health care. Premier, what happened to your promise to ensure that you wouldn't cut health care, compromise patient care or nursing jobs?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite does know that we're not cutting health care. In fact, the opposite is true: We're increasing it this year—we've outlined that in the budget—as we've been increasing the health care budget every year since 2003, when we first came into office.

I want to say one of the items that I'm most proud of in the budget, which hasn't got any attention, I think, thus far, that I want to reference—I'm going to quote Dr.

Dave Williams from the Ontario Health Innovation Council. His quote is, "The Ontario Health Innovation Council is thrilled with the announcement of the creation of the \$20-million Health Innovation Fund. This will ensure that Ontario will become a fertile ground for the development of innovative health technologies that will create economic growth and value in the system."

We have the Ontario Home Care Association as well talking about how pleased they are with the budget, "because we know it will help us to serve more Ontarians and keep them safe and independent at home."

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. On Friday, I was in Thunder Bay to host a round table on health care. I spoke to many people on different parts of the front-line services, and what I heard was absolutely appalling.

Since the beginning of the year, there have regularly been more patients than available beds. In fact, this was the case for about 28 straight days—almost a month—at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre; 28 beds have been closed at the geriatric unit and 11 RPN positions have been cut.

Why is this Premier refusing to take responsibility for the mess her short-sighted cuts have made to the health care system not only in Thunder Bay, but across our province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We know that we've had challenges in Thunder Bay at the hospital there and in the community. We addressed those last year to the satisfaction of the hospital, the LHIN and those engaged in the health care sector in Thunder Bay, but there is more work to be done, and we'll continue to do that important work in Thunder Bay, as we do across the province.

But it's important that when we reference the changes in health care, we also stick to the facts. I have to get back to Lakeridge Health and the comment that was made by the opposition critic last week. I actually have in my hands now the letter from the CEO and president, Kevin Empey, from Lakeridge Health, who responds specifically to what I would describe, based on the letter, as the erroneous comments that were made in the Legislature last week. He talked about—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: He says, "It was with great disappointment that I read in Hansard"—he's speaking to the member from Nickel Belt—"your comments about our hospital, particularly the services"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my supplementary—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry, supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With the introduction of the right-wing Mike Harris-style budget the Liberals an-

nounced on Thursday, the people of the north and across the province can only expect more health care services to become worse.

The hospital is already facing a \$6-million—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order.

Sorry for the interruption. Carry on.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The hospital is already facing a \$6-million budget deficit. There is no doubt that further cuts, which are in that budget, will come to nurses and other front-line workers.

Nurses are being forced to provide care in hallways due to constant gridlock in that hospital. Patient care is at risk. Why is this government attempting to balance the books on the backs of patients in the Thunder Bay hospital and around this province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite knows that we're transforming our health care system, and we're not cutting health care; we're increasing it.

But the critic for health, the member for Nickelback last week—I'm quoting from the letter—
Interjections.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Nickel Belt.

The member referenced—this is the letter from the president of Lakeridge Health. Speaking to the member: "You referenced human resource adjustments made in our laboratory program and said they are having a negative impact on patients in our cancer centre. I wish you had phoned me first to verify the details because the assertion above is demonstrably inaccurate.

"First - the people. The implication is that people were recently put out of a job, and that is false.... Nobody was 'let go'.

"Second - the quality of care. You asserted these changes in our laboratory program are having a 'devastating impact on the quality of care' offered"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —"at our cancer centre." This cancer centre "has regularly ranked in the top three in the province since 2012."

The letter goes on.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The NDP closed 52 hospitals.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I just want to remind the deputy House leader that he's not allowed to do drive-by heckling.

New question.

FOREST FIREFIGHTING

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Ontario is home to about 71 million hectares of forest and about 85 billion trees. Our forests provide both environmental and economic benefits to our province. They support jobs, absorb carbon and provide habitat to a variety of species that call Ontario home.

To protect our forests and ensure public safety, each spring we prepare for the forest fire season. We've heard reports that the first fires of the year are already happening in northwestern Ontario.

Fighting forest fires, we can all agree, is a top priority for our government. Could the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry please explain to this House what his ministry is doing to ensure Ontario is prepared to respond to potential forest fire emergencies in 2015?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question.

It is already, believe it or not, forest firefighting season, certainly in northern Ontario and across much of the rest of the province. It's here, and we need to make sure the communities that are represented by this service know that we are, in fact, prepared.

Ontario's fire program is recognized around the world for its ability to prepare for and respond to risks related to public safety and the protection of our natural resources. The hiring of Ontario fire rangers began earlier this month, and other required preparedness activities are already under way, including training and equipment checks in anticipation of wild-land fire activity. By early May, we will have a full complement of over 760 trained MNRF firefighters, with a further 320 firefighters available from the private sector to assist us as required.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Bill Mauro: In addition, we have nine heavy water bombers, three Twin Otter medium water bombers, 13 initial attack helicopters—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Bill Mauro:—seven bird dog aircraft and 10—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you to the minister for his response and his dedication to ensuring Ontario is prepared for the forest fire season.

Last week our government introduced the 2015 budget, our plan for building Ontario up. In response, the leader of the third party made some very startling accusations. She told the Sudbury Star, "Emergency forest firefighting is being cut.... In 2012-13 it had a budget of \$180 million, then it went down to \$79.4 million. Now it's going down to \$69.8 million."

These numbers are very startling, and many Ontarians who heard that quote from the leader of the third party might be led to believe that our province is reducing our commitment to fighting forest fires. Could the minister please explain to the members of this House exactly how our government funds emergency forest firefighting?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. It is important to set the record straight and address the fearmongering that's been going on across northern Ontario by the leader of the third party. This is exactly the same approach that the previous leader of the NDP undertook back in 2007.

The quote was this: "In 2012-13, it had a budget of \$180 million. Then it went down to \$80 million. Now it's going down to \$69 million." Of course, that was probably

the worst firefighting season in the history of northern Ontario or Ontario as a province.

The leader of the third party should know—and if she doesn't, she should do a little bit more homework—that there is always a number for emergency forest firefighting in the budget, and then on an as-needed basis. If you should have a severe forest fire season, you go back, the Treasury Board gives you the money overnight, things happen and we're ready. This is fearmongering at its worst.

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The Minister of Health just finished expressing his comments in terms of what happened with the health care file in Sudbury. The leader of the third party did the same thing in Sudbury when it came to emergency forest fire preparedness. This is wrong, fearmongering at its worst, and I felt—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

HOUSING SERVICES CORP.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Speaker, my question is to the Premier.

Under your government the debt has doubled and the waiting list for social housing has grown to 165,000 families. Ontario can't afford to waste social housing dollars, but that's exactly what's happening. Every dollar the Housing Services Corp. spends is a dollar that's intended to build, repair and operate social housing. It's a public dollar taken from social housing providers by overcharging them for natural gas and insurance.

Premier, will you allow social housing providers to opt out of the Housing Services Corp. so they can save millions of dollars for their social housing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I think we've answered that question a couple of times already, but let me take another stab at it.

The Housing Services Corp. was established by the official opposition when they were actually in government. They put in place a pooling mechanism to service municipalities and to provide savings. That's worked reasonably well. There are some concerns that have been raised by the member opposite which I concur with, and we need to look at those. That's why we initiated some changes with the Housing Services board and are currently undertaking with them an independent review of their operation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is back to the Premier—and I would just say to the minister: Not only did you not answer today; you've never answered it before when I asked.

Last week's budget did not contain a single new dollar for social housing. We have put forward a solution that would give housing providers millions more for affordable housing without adding significantly to your deficit:

simply allowing housing providers to purchase natural gas and insurance at the best price that they can get rather than forcing them to buy through the Housing Services Corp. Premier, will you agree to let them opt out so those millions can go to help families in need of social housing?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Again, Mr. Speaker, when you talk about housing solutions, their solution in government was to download housing to municipalities. We're still working as hard as we can to recover from that mess that they created. And now they're pulling the fire alarm on a fire that they set when they put the Housing Services Corp. in place.

We're going to do this right. There are some legitimate concerns that have been raised and the member opposite knows we're addressing them. When the report comes in from the independent consultant, if there are changes that need to be made, you can be sure we'll make them.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Start the clock.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Minister of Labour. On February 8, a Durham firefighting student named Adam Brunt lost his life in an accident during unregulated private fire safety training. Tragically this was not an isolated incident, as volunteer firefighter Gary Kendall was killed during the same type of training less than five years before.

Following Adam's death, I called on the minister to take action and regulate this industry before another accident occurred. But the response that I received was nothing but a laundry list of existing legislation that does not apply to these firefighter trainees. These were accidents, but if we allow the situation to continue it becomes neglect. Will the minister take action and commit to regulating the private safety training industry today?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Certainly our condolences go out to the families and to the colleagues of the people who were tragically killed as they were training to ensure that they had the skills necessary to ensure that when they were called upon to respond as first responders, they indeed had those skills; they'd taken that training.

I did receive correspondence from the member opposite, and I tried to provide her, I think, with the best advice that I had received on the best way to proceed with this. There's a number of angles to this. Obviously, there's an educational component. There's a labour component. There's a training, colleges and universities component as well.

We're taking it extremely seriously in a number of ways. We know that we have to come to grips with this issue in a way that ensures that those people who choose to enter the field of emergency preparedness are indeed able to train in a safe environment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Tomorrow is the National Day of Mourning. It is a day when we remember those we've lost in workplace accidents and commit to doing everything in our power to prevent future accidents from occurring.

Adam Brunt was not yet a worker, but he was going to be. Tomorrow, his loss will be mourned.

Speaker, I will ask again: Will the minister commit to regulating the private fire safety training industry before another senseless and preventable loss occurs?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I do appreciate the member drawing attention to the day of mourning for all workers in the province of Ontario and, indeed, across this country, who have lost their lives when they simply went to work in the morning.

I can tell the member opposite that the issue is still under investigation. The incidents that took place, in the last incident—certainly the details are being investigated in the way they should. We are working with training, colleges and universities to see what more can be done.

As I said, these individuals need to have the best training they can possibly have. We need to ensure that that training is done in as safe as possible an environment as we possibly can.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'd like to correct my record. I said earlier—when mentioning that I believe the leader of the third party was fearmongering about forest firefighting, I referenced comments that she had made in Sudbury; I meant to say comments she had made in Thunder Bay.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

VISITORS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I want to introduce in the House—they may still be here; some of them may have left—members of the Canadian Beverage Association: Ron Soreanu, John O'Leary, Neil Antymis, John Chalinor, Jim Goetz, Brandon Ashmore, Carolyn Fell and Alison Bing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I suspect deeply that the former Prime Minister misses question period.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1158 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MINISTER'S COMMENTS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to draw your awareness to a very serious situation. I think all of you in this House would agree that there's nothing more hon-

ourable than being elected by constituents to represent them here at the Ontario Legislative Assembly. We cannot take that responsibility for granted, nor should we be playing games with it. Unfortunately, there are a number of people from Goderich, from my riding of Huron-Bruce, who are furious with a particular member who has chosen to play games with a devastating event that wreaked havoc on their community in August 2011.

Last week, in response to a sincere question, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change chose to possibly mock me by saying, "If you do not support this cap-and-trade, would you like to expose your constituents to another tornado?" I'm paraphrasing a notch, Speaker, but that was the gist of it. The people in Goderich are furious, and they say, "How dare an elected official make fun of a devastating event that absolutely tore a town and families apart?"

Speaker, I expect better of the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, and I do ask sincerely for an apology for the town of Goderich.

RIDING OF WINDSOR-TECUMSEH

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Good afternoon, Speaker, and welcome to this local newscast. Let's start off with a good-news story: For the eighth time in the past 10 years, the town of Tecumseh has ranked within the top 10 of Canada's safest communities. Statistics Canada does the ranking, and for safe communities with more than 10,000 residents, Tecumseh is rated number 6 in the country.

Essex county Warden Tom Bain is recovering from a nasty spill while jogging one of his racehorses. Warden Bain suffered four broken ribs, a crushed collarbone and a broken bone in his back. Tom, we need you. Get well soon. We're thinking of you up here at Queen's Park.

And we're thinking of the mayor and councillors in Leamington as well, Speaker. Condolences go out to the family of Leamington Councillor Rick Atkin. Rick died suddenly of natural causes last week, and we will miss him in our region.

Tomorrow, as you know, is the National Day of Mourning. Too many workers continue to be killed on the job. We must do more to make workplace safety a priority in this province. Ceremonies highlighting this will be held across Ontario tomorrow. I'll be here and will miss the one in Windsor, but later this year I hope to introduce a private member's bill that will call for the lowering of flags at all schools, hospitals, municipal buildings, colleges and universities on the Day of Mourning.

That, Speaker, is the latest news from Windsor-Tecumseh. Back to you on the anchor desk.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I'm kind of liking this.

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Today I rise to discuss a constituent of mine who faces a daily battle to breathe. Dean Sellers is a resident of Cambridge who suffers from

chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, which inhibits his ability to live a normal life.

COPD is a disease causing chronically poor airflow to the lungs, making it extremely difficult to breathe. COPD tends to worsen over time.

The Ontario Lung Association states that over 850,000 Ontarians aged 35 or older suffer from COPD; that includes my son Rory, now age 35. They struggle with each breath they take. The Ontario Lung Association is raising awareness about COPD and encouraging Ontarians to have a spirometry test, which is effective in early diagnosis—key to treatment later on.

Dean's COPD has deteriorated and now he has just 14% lung capacity. He requires an oxygen tank to breathe, but even then it's difficult.

Dean's family organized a fundraiser on April 18 at the Cambridge Newfoundland Club to raise money to help him and his wife, Sue, to cope with this disease. Dean is currently awaiting a double lung transplant, and he is looking forward, as he told me that evening, to spending time with his children and grandchildren for many years to come.

Dean's story reminds us of the importance of organ donation. Only 25% of Ontarians are registered as organ donors, and I want to encourage all Ontarians to sign up today at beadoner.ca. One organ donor can save eight lives.

SOLDIERS OF SONG

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This weekend, I had the privilege of attending the Soldiers of Song performance at the Listowel Legion. Their performance was a tribute to the Dumbells, the pioneers of sketch comedy. In 1917, around Vimy Ridge, a group of soldiers came together to form a comedy and musical troop called the Dumbells. They entertained Canadian troops during the First World War with humorous songs and sketches about life in the trenches.

After the war, the Dumbells toured Canada as professional entertainers. They became the first-ever Canadian production to score a hit on Broadway. The Dumbells' journey is now being celebrated in Dr. Jason Wilson's musical play *Soldiers of Song*.

Soldiers of Song is a Canadian theatre show that travels around the world celebrating the Dumbells. The show was a wonderful tribute to the soldiers who entertained their comrades and boosted morale through the First World War.

I would like to thank the Listowel Legion and the North Perth arts council for bringing the show to Perth-Wellington.

I would also like to recognize Listowel native Andrew Knowlton, who performs in the show. I would encourage everyone to go and see the *Soldiers of Song* and learn more about these Canadian entertainers.

MARIE CHARETTE-POULIN

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: I rise today on behalf of the people of Sudbury to recognize Senator Marie Charette-

Poulin, who stepped down as senator for the northern Ontario region on April 17 due to health reasons.

Senator Charette-Poulin was born and raised in Sudbury and, of course, in Haileybury as well. Before being appointed to the Senate in 1995, she had an exemplary career as a public servant. She founded the CBC's northern Ontario French services, as well as the radio station CBON. She later went on to serve, among other roles, as the vice-president of the CBC and the Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council. In the Senate, she was always an advocate for northern Ontario and in particular our francophone community in the north. In 2006, she became the first francophone woman to be president of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Merci à la sénatrice Charette-Poulin pour donner la parole à la communauté franco-ontarienne au nord de l'Ontario. Les gens de Sudbury et du nord de l'Ontario vous remercient pour vos années de service.

Mr. Speaker, there are many events that I could speak about Senator Charette-Poulin attending, but the one that I think was most important was the one last year which all of us attended at the co-operative funeral hall: the renaming of a new memorial for all of our fallen soldiers who were killed in Afghanistan. That was something that Senator Charette-Poulin was very proud to attend, and we all thank her for her years of public service.

LEADERCAST

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise to celebrate a great initiative that has truly captured the hearts of leaders of Leeds-Grenville. On May 8, hundreds of people from my riding and beyond will gather at Centennial Road Church to take part in Leadercast 2015.

I've had the privilege of attending the Brockville Leadercast in the past. It is truly an inspiring day. Speaker, that remarkable turnout that we had, the 400 people, is a real tribute to the hard work of local organizers, but it also says something about our community. Leeds-Grenville is renowned as a place where people roll up their sleeves to support a good cause. The reason is, we're blessed with so many people ready to accept the responsibility of leadership. They come from all walks of life and contribute in many ways, but they share a common trait: the desire and courage to be a champion for positive change.

I'm a great supporter of Leadercast because the message from the incredible lineup of speakers is all about empowering people to be even more effective leaders. This year's theme, "The Brave Ones," has speakers that include Peyton Manning, Malala Yousafzai and Rudy Giuliani.

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Unfortunately, a previous commitment has caused me not to be able to attend this year's Leadercast, but to those who are attending, I want to thank you for taking time to be involved. I'm so excited to see what great things Leadercast 2015 inspires you to do.

RAIL SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to rise again today to draw attention to my constituents in Gogama, who are trying to work through the aftermath of the bitumen spill that occurred in their community on March 7.

For people down here, Gogama is easy to forget, but for the people of Gogama, as the ice starts to melt and the water in the bay shows signs of oil floating on top, the worries are constant. Local citizens have questions about their community's future.

As a community on the shore of the Makami River and the beautiful Lake Minisinakwa, their future lies in that water's health and its ability to continue to support surrounding wildlife and their environment. The people of Gogama are asking for support from their provincial government. They want help with the environmental assessment and all this data and the interpretation of it. They want help putting a dollar figure on their loss. They want their provincial governments to pay attention to them and acknowledge that they exist, that they are struggling right now and that they need help.

Right now, Gogama, all by itself, is trying to hold CN to account—a community of 200 strong holding a multi-million-dollar corporation to account. This is a David-and-Goliath battle. The provincial government needs to step in. It is the responsibility of the provincial government to hold CN to account.

KINGSTON GETS ACTIVE MONTH

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I rise today to tell you about a wonderful initiative in my community called Kingston Gets Active Month. Sponsored by Canadian Sport for Life Kingston and funded by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, the program challenges us in four simple ways to eat healthier, connect more, be more mindful and get more active.

"Being healthy" could mean using more local fresh fruits and vegetables for their nutrients and drinking more water.

"Connecting more" might mean volunteering with an organization or a charity, or joining a YMCA or sports club.

If you work behind a desk, "being mindful" might involve getting up and changing positions every few minutes.

"Being more active" could mean leaving the car at home or walking or using a bike instead, or it could mean squeezing a walk into your work day.

This month, I encouraged members of the public to join me on an hour pre-lunchtime walk and chat, and I hosted two public hikes at a local conservation area. I feel wonderful having done it, and I'm proud to say that I've done almost 7,000 steps today. I'm determined to try and continue. I'm happy that so many local businesses and agencies joined in to offer free activities for people of all ages during Kingston Gets Active Month.

I want to congratulate the wonderful Canadian Sport for Life team—Lara Paterson, Mary Jane Gordon, Denita

Arthurs, Chris Eveleigh, Ashley Johnson, Kristin Côté, Linda Whitfield and Jennifer Ashbury—who have worked so hard to foster life-long health and wellness by increasing the opportunities for play and physical activity in our great community. Merci.

EARTHQUAKE IN NEPAL

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I rise on behalf of all members of the Legislature in all three parties to extend our heartfelt prayers, condolences and pledges of support to the people of Nepal. As you will know, very recently they suffered a once-in-a-century-level earthquake, apparently 7.8 on the Richter scale. The imagery and the videos and the testimonials are simply heartbreaking.

So far, we understand that the death toll exceeds 5,000. The damage to the cultural artifacts, to the buildings, to the already modest infrastructure of the country and its capital, Katmandu, as well as surrounding areas, is perhaps of epic proportions.

The government of Canada has stepped up to the plate. We thank them for the \$5-million commitment. And they've dispatched the DART team, the disaster relief team.

I can tell you that right in Etobicoke we house Global-Medic, which is perhaps an echo of the DART disaster relief team. They have also dispatched food and aid and people on the ground and personnel and water purification etc.

I would simply say, on behalf once again of the people of Ontario to the people of Nepal: We stand with you in your time of need.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

Before I move on to routine proceedings, I want to bring clarification again to the group. In rotation of statements, that is a routine proceedings process. For clarity purposes, we do a rotation under agreement. If someone else wants to move—the Speaker does not have the authority to make changes in that process. If someone else does not stand up as a result of that—and I inadvertently called it a game of chicken, so that you understand—if no one stands up, statements are finished.

So to be clear, if you seek it, I'm giving you the advice to why not just send a note to somebody saying, "Would you mind if I?" It would be beneficial because if it gets into a game of chicken, we could be losing many statements like the ones we've heard today. So I'm asking for your co-operation in staying with the routine proceedings unless there's some reason that you are compelled that have you to do that.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron—Bruce is chomping at the bit.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I slipped the clutch there; that's what happened. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Soliris for patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome (aHUS), an ultra-rare, chronic and life-threatening genetic condition that progressively damages vital organs, leading to heart attack, stroke and kidney failure; and

"Whereas Soliris, the first and only pharmaceutical treatment in Canada for the treatment of aHUS, has allowed patients to discontinue plasma and dialysis therapies, and has been shown to improve kidney function and enable successful kidney transplant; and

"Whereas the lack of public funding for Soliris is especially burdensome on the families of Ontario children and adults battling this catastrophic disease;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Instruct the Ontario government to immediately provide Soliris as a choice to patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding."

I totally agree with this petition: I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with Ishika. Thank you very much.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

M^{me} France G  linas: I have this petition that was collected by Aki, Joanne and Lilian Tarrvudd from Dew Drop Road in my riding. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the NDP MPP for Timiskaming-Cochrane, John Vanthof, has introduced Bill 46 in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario so that UTVs (utility task vehicles) would be treated like all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) by the Highway Traffic Act;...

"Whereas this bill will have positive economic impact on clubs, manufacturers, dealers and rental shops and will boost revenues to communities promoting this outdoor activity;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To vote in favour of MPP Vanthof's Bill 46 to allow UTVs the same access as ATVs in the Highway Traffic Act."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Colton to bring it to the Clerk.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with the petition, affix my signature and give it to page Jae Min.

1320

BODIES REVEALED EXHIBIT

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Danielle Zhu and Jane Pang of the Falun Gong have asked me to read the following petition:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bodies Revealed in Niagara Falls is displaying dead, skinned human bodies in different poses that may have been murdered by police in China;

"Whereas the organizers cannot produce any consent papers from relatives and even disclaim that they cannot independently verify that [the bodies] do not belong to persons executed while incarcerated in Chinese prisons;

"Whereas Ontario residents want these bodies seized for investigations and for family reunification;

"Whereas the Ontario chief coroner refuses to seize the bodies because the deaths occurred outside the province;

"Whereas states like Hawaii have passed legislation prohibiting the display of dead human bodies (including plastinated bodies) for commercial profit. Legislators stated: 'While the exhibit is informative, its educational or health-related values do not outweigh the moral and ethical concerns regarding the possible exploitation of human beings.';

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Demand the chief coroner to seize the bodies immediately and not allow them to leave Ontario;

"Pass legislation to prohibit the display of dead human bodies (including plastinated bodies) for commercial profit."

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature and give it to page Madison to take to the desk.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas northern Ontario communities are connected across long distances by bus service; and

"Whereas the ONTC bus service is the only form of public transportation available to many northern Ontario residents; and

"Whereas reduction of customer service and the closure of stations will cause deterioration of the overall system of public transportation of passengers and goods in northeastern Ontario; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario committed to providing enhanced bus service to alleviate the loss of the ONTC passenger rail service;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Ontario Northland Transportation Commission bus service must be enhanced to ensure reliable and continuous accessibility including uniform provision of adequate public transportation for all communities and people of northern Ontario."

I wholeheartedly agree, sign my signature and give it page Afiyah.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I agree with this petition, affix my name and give it to page Ethan.

PESTICIDES

Mr. Todd Smith: This is on behalf of many in our agricultural community.

"To the Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to make regulatory changes to the Pesticides Act that will have a considerable negative impact on virtually all of Ontario's corn and soybean farmers;

"Whereas comments on the proposed regulations need to be submitted by May 7, 2015; yet the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs plainly states on their website that '[t]he optimum planting day [for corn] is on or before May 7 in southwestern Ontario and May 10 in central and eastern Ontario. Delaying planting past the optimum date can result in yield reductions averaging about 1% per day of delay in May.';

"Whereas the ministry's website also says: 'The highest yields of soybeans are obtained from early plantings, generally the first 10 days of May. Later plantings are likely to incur significant reductions in yield ... '";

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Instruct the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change to extend the comment period on EBR posting number 012-3733 beyond the planting season for corn and soybeans as defined by AgriCorp planting deadlines to allow farmers to farm, and be properly consulted on these proposed regulations that will significantly impact their livelihoods."

I agree with this. I will sign it and send it to the table with page Joshua.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital."

I fully agree, Speaker. I will sign my name and give it to page Joshua to bring up to the desk.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise this afternoon in the House to read this petition that is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with this petition. I'm going to affix my name to it and send it down to the table with Afiyah.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition here for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas it has been over a decade since regulation 316/03 of the Highway Traffic Act has been updated to recognize new classes of off-road vehicles and a motion to do so passed on November 7, 2013, with unanimous support of the provincial Legislature;

"Whereas owners of two-up ATVs and side-by-side UTVs deserve clarity in knowing which roadways and trails are legal for use of these off-road vehicles; and

"Whereas owners should be able to legally use their vehicles to access woodlots, trails and hunting and fishing destinations;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That private member's Bill 58, which seeks to update the Highway Traffic Act to include new classes of all-terrain and utility task vehicles, receive swift passage through the Legislature."

I support this petition, affix my name to it and send it down with page Ryan.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain that cause thinking, memory and physical functioning to become seriously impaired;

"Whereas there is no known cause or cure for this devastating illness; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias also take their toll on hundreds of thousands of families and care partners; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias affect more than 200,000 Ontarians today, with an annual total economic burden rising to \$15.7 billion by 2020; and

"Whereas the cost related to the health care system is in the billions and only going to increase, at a time when our health care system is already facing enormous financial challenges; and

"Whereas there is work under way to address the need, but no coordinated or comprehensive approach to tackling the issues; and

"Whereas there is an urgent need to plan and raise awareness and understanding about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias for the sake of improving the quality of life of the people it touches;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To approve the development of a comprehensive Ontario dementia plan that would include the development of strategies in primary health care, in health promotion and prevention of illness, in community development, in building community capacity and care partner engagement, in caregiver support and investments in research."

I totally support this petition. I affix my name to it and will give it to page Jae Min to take to the table.

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TERRY FOX DAY

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas on March 26, Bill 61, the Terry Fox Day Act, passed second reading with unanimous support from the Ontario Legislature;

"Whereas if passed at third reading before the Legislature rises in June, Bill 61 will proclaim the second Sunday after Labour Day in 2015, September 20, as Ontario's first Terry Fox Day;

"Whereas the second Sunday after Labour Day is the day on which the Terry Fox Run is traditionally held, and September 20, 2015, marks its 35th anniversary;

"Whereas on November 27, 2014, Terry Fox's home province of British Columbia passed similar legislation proclaiming this same day as Terry Fox Day starting this year;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly move quickly to pass Bill 61 at third reading before the end of the current session, ensuring that on September 20, 2015, Ontarians can celebrate Terry Fox Day."

I support the petition and I will give my petition to page Misha.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: This is a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 ... that doesn't necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart meter program that failed to conserve energy, and households are paying almost \$700 more ... for unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

"Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating; and

"Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

"Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To abandon the idea of introducing yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses."

I agree with this and will affix my signature and send it down with Chloe.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AMENDMENT ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SOCIÉTÉ DE PROTECTION DES ANIMAUX DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 80, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animals for Research Act with respect to the possession and breeding of orcas and administrative requirements for animal care / Projet de loi 80, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario et la Loi sur les animaux destinés à la recherche en ce qui concerne la possession et l'élevage d'épaulards ainsi que les exigences administratives relatives aux soins dispensés aux animaux.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 22, 2015, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Naqvi has moved second reading of Bill 80, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animals for Research Act with respect to the possession and breeding of orcas and administrative requirements for animal care. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I believe I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

I have received a notice from the government House leader to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly: "Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on second reading of Bill 80 be deferred until deferred votes on Tuesday, April 28, 2015."

Second reading vote deferred.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE RÉGIME DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE DE L'ONTARIO

Ms. Hunter moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 56, Loi exigeant l'établissement du Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Debate?

Hon. Mitzi Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today for the third reading of Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2015.

I want to begin by thanking the members of this House for the thoughtful debate that has taken place on this important piece of legislation. The ORPP is a central part of the government's plan to build Ontario up. We value the input that we have received from all members of the House to date. I would particularly like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for their feedback and contributions to the legislative process. In particular, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the member from Etobicoke North for his leadership and assistance in shepherding this bill through the committee process. Finally, I would also like to express thanks to the many groups that took the time to share their insights with members of the committee during public hearings.

Since assuming the role of the Associate Minister of Finance responsible for the ORPP, I've been meeting with individuals and stakeholders from across the province to discuss how to ensure the ORPP is the best plan possible for the people of Ontario. I was pleased to see many of those groups and others come to the Legislature to discuss the importance of enhancing retirement security.

Today, I'm pleased to once again have the chance to highlight the positive impact of this bill for Ontarians. This bill is a major step forward in fulfilling our commitment to establishing the ORPP by 2017. This legislation is a key step forward in addressing the retirement savings challenge facing Ontarians today. It would give the government the tools it needs to ensure that working Ontarians are able to achieve the retirement security they deserve.

Over the past few months, I've had the pleasure of travelling across the province to speak with Ontarians about our government's plan. I've spoken with a wide range of individuals, families, organizations, young workers, pension experts, businesses, labour groups and associations from all corners of the province. Throughout all these conversations, one thing has been very clear: People are concerned about their retirement. I have heard time and time again that there is a gap between what people are able to save and what they will need in retirement. Many people are worried they will outlive their savings. Some are concerned that they may never be able to retire at all. This concern is exactly why we've introduced this bill: to move to close this gap and help give people in this province the financial security they deserve in retirement. Passing Bill 56 is a critical step to giving millions of Ontarians the retirement security they want and need.

Bill 56 lays out the foundation for the ORPP and would commit the government to establish the plan by January 2017. It has a framework for key design parameters and includes a requirement to establish an entity to administer the plan. Once implemented, the ORPP would expand pension coverage to millions of workers and ensure that Ontarians have a secure retirement income floor that they can rely on. The people of Ontario need this plan. This plan will give people confidence in their retirement future.

The realities of life today for the workforce are much different than they were in our parents' generation. People are more mobile than ever before. On average, workers can expect to change employers about five times throughout their careers. This makes consistent participation in a workplace plan difficult. As well, the proportion of Ontarians with workplace pension plan coverage is low and is getting lower. In 2012, only 34% of Ontario workers had a workplace plan. The numbers are even lower when you look at the private sector, where only 28% are benefiting from membership in a workplace pension plan.

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Young people are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to workplace pension plans. Their working lives involve multiple jobs, sometimes temporary or part-time, so they have a patchwork of pension coverage at best. In 2012, only about one quarter of workers aged 25 to 34 had workplace plans, compared to nearly half of workers aged 45 to 54. Young people today worry that they might never achieve the security their parents' generation had.

With low workplace pension coverage, people must turn elsewhere, so they rely more heavily on personal savings. However, study after study shows us that people are not taking advantage of voluntary retirement savings vehicles. In 2012, 81% of available TFSA room is currently unused. In 2013, there was approximately \$790 billion in unused RRSP room in Canada—about \$300 billion in Ontario alone.

Studies from major financial institutions including CIBC, RBC, BMO and Sun Life have shown growing numbers of Ontarians who have not been saving sufficiently. In a recent poll, RBC found that only 39% of respondents put money away for retirement in 2014, and 30% had not begun saving at all. BMO found that one third of Canadians have less than \$10,000 in savings. Sun Life Financial found that 60% of Canadians now expect to work past 65, up from 48% in 2008.

For those who do manage to save, high management fees, low interest rates and unpredictable market performance have led to lower returns on their investments. Add to this the fact that lifespans are increasing. A 20-year-old today can expect to reach age 90, and one in 10 is expected to live to 100.

While increasing life expectancy is a sign of higher living standards and better health outcomes—something we should be proud of, Mr. Speaker—it also places more pressure on personal savings, creating a need for them to stretch further, so those who have managed to put away money are worrying that they might actually outlive their savings. Many of the Ontarians I spoke to fear that they will never be able to retire at all, while others are concerned that the physically demanding nature of their jobs will prevent them from continuing to work before they are financially prepared for retirement.

What is clear is that our 20th-century system is not meeting the needs of our 21st-century economy. This is deeply concerning for our government. We know that pensions are a significant economic driver for communities across Ontario.

A 2012 Boston Consulting Group study found that, on average, 14 cents of every dollar of income in Ontario communities comes from pensions. Over the next 20 years, the number of seniors in Ontario will almost double, and this is a growing percentage of the population which faces low pension coverage and inadequate savings. They will spend less.

Less spending could slow consumption and growth. This will put pressure on our economy and our publicly funded institutions, like health care and education. On an individual level, that's concerning for future seniors, whose standards of living will decline. Collectively, it has the potential to compromise our long-term economic prosperity. That's not good for people. That's not good for business. That's not good for the economy.

Ontarians expect leadership and action to strengthen retirement security for Ontario's workers. For younger generations, personal savings will have to stretch over a retirement period that is likely to last several decades. After a lifetime of contributing to our 21st-century economy, they will need a plan to provide them with security in their 21st-century retirement.

In Canada, with the Canada Pension Plan, we already have a savings vehicle that's supporting a modern and mobile labour force. Unfortunately, the federal government has shut down any and all discussions on enhancements. Mr. Speaker, in the absence of a CPP enhancement, our government is taking action. The ORPP will build on the key features of the CPP and provide a predictable stream of retirement income for life. This will ensure that Ontarians have the retirement security they worked for, the security they've earned and the security they deserve. That sense of security is important for each Ontarian, for each business and for our economy as a whole.

The ORPP would be the first of its kind—a mandatory provincial pension plan—and would address the retirement needs of a modern, mobile, 21st-century workforce. The ORPP would aim to replace 15% of an individual's pre-retirement earnings, up to \$90,000. It would require the contribution rate to be the same for employers and employees, not exceeding 3.8% combined. Together with the current CPP, this would supplement personal savings and provide a secure retirement income floor for life.

The ORPP would also be designed to ensure that benefits are earned as contributions are made, so that the system is fair for all generations. And it would pool longevity and investment risk, protecting investments from volatile markets.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight some of the key elements of the bill for members of this House. This bill lays out the rules for eligibility to participate in the ORPP. Contributions would be managed by a publicly administered entity at arm's length from government. As noted in the bill, the administrative entity would be responsible for enrolling eligible employees and employers into the ORPP; collecting, holding and investing contributions; and paying out retirement benefits. The 2015 Ontario budget, tabled last week by my honourable colleague the Minister of Finance, introduced the

legislation that would establish this entity: the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Administration Corp.

As we move forward with the ORPP we have been mindful of the impact on business and we're taking steps to minimize those impacts. For instance, we outlined that the enrollment would occur in stages, starting with the largest employers, and contributions would be phased in over two years. We know that business owners care about the well-being of their employees; I saw that from speaking to many businesses. Yet it's more than that: They feel responsible to help the people who work for them to save for their retirement.

At committee hearings, a business owner from Burlington said that the ORPP "makes sense for Ontario, it makes sense for employees and it makes sense" for his business. He believes that "it's a reasonable cost given the benefit that it provides to our employees."

But the reality is that today the cost and administration involved in certain workplace pension plans have made it difficult, if not impossible, for some employers to offer them. The ORPP would allow employers—who may not otherwise be able to offer their employees the opportunity to contribute and to accumulate benefits—to help them save for their retirement years.

It is evident that greater security for workers translates into a more confident and productive workforce. Collectively, we know that increased retirement savings will contribute to economic growth and create jobs.

According to analysis from the former governor of the Bank of Canada, David Dodge, an enhancement of retirement savings will benefit the economy. In his 2014 report *Macroeconomic Aspects of Retirement Savings*, Dodge states that any short-term impact "will automatically be offset in part through the exchange rate and other structural adjustments and which should be offset by an easier monetary policy...."

Further, he said, "In the longer run, higher household saving would enhance growth of output and incomes."

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The research from BCG found that seniors with predictable streams of income are confident consumers. That is because receiving a set amount of money each month gives them the security to spend and contribute to their local communities.

As members of the House can see, the benefits of this plan are numerous. That is why we are working diligently towards 2017 to make the ORPP a reality. In order to get there, it is essential to work quickly and effectively.

As we move forward, we're continuing to leverage the expertise of the members of our Technical Advisory Group on Retirement Security, as well as our implementation lead, Michael Nobrega. I would like to extend thanks once again to these individuals for their advice, opinions and support.

Before I conclude, I would also like to offer thanks once again to the standing committee for its work in examining the framework legislation for Bill 56, and to those who presented to the committee. These perspec-

tives have given us lots to think about and will help inform the final design of the ORPP. We are designing the ORPP to support the province's modern workforce and want to ensure that Ontarians in every stage of their working lives are covered.

We recognize that all Ontarians share the need to save for retirement. The ORPP would be designed to strike a balance to ensure people are maximizing their benefits in the long term. What I can tell you is that we are building the best plan possible for the people of Ontario. We will be considering the feedback received from submissions and consultations and will announce conclusions on the key design questions for the ORPP shortly.

The ORPP would ensure that workers in multiple jobs or part-time jobs receive work benefits as much as possible from the ORPP. This is especially important for recent immigrants, like many in my riding of Scarborough-Guildwood, and persons with disabilities or young people who face barriers to securing well-paying jobs with workplace pension plans.

This government is taking leadership to ensure that Ontarians can achieve the secure retirement they deserve.

Passing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2015, would be a major step in helping working Ontarians address the undersavings challenge. Strengthening the retirement income system is our priority, and ensuring that everyone can afford to retire is part of the government's four-part plan for building Ontario up.

This bill is about securing our collective futures. It is about providing more certainty for the retirement futures of the people in this province. Once in place, the ORPP would help millions of Ontario workers retire with more financial security. And after a lifetime of contributing to the economy, we think people deserve a strong and secure retirement.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the members of this House to support the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2015.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakubuski: I appreciate the view of the Associate Minister of Finance. She has still yet to answer my question on how much it's going to be—you know that one I keep asking you, Minister?

Of course, we have indicated clearly on this side of the House that we don't share the view of the minister and we do not share the view of the government on the ORPP, and for some very good reasons. I met with some people last week from the CFIB and, boy, they're not very happy about the ORPP either. I spoke to some Home Hardware folks last week as well about what this is going to do to members of their organization and the employees in those companies.

This amounts to another tax on the wages of employees and another tax on to employers. The question is, what is the motivation for the government? You see, the Premier keeps saying she wants to make life easier for the middle class. Well, that's almost laughable when you see what this government has done in the last 12 years to that so-called middle class. Every time the people who

occupy that class turn around, this government is making it harder for them to get by, not easier. If they weren't taxing the you-know-what out of them—and with fees. You know, it doesn't matter what it is; little things here and there—not enough for something to go AWOL on. Just think of additions and licensing of your vehicle, all of those things that they've—you know the phrase—nickel and dined them to death over the last 12 years. But what it has done is made it harder for those individuals to put that money into savings so that they'll have a secure retirement because you, on this side of the House, can't seem to get enough of their money, and now you're going to tax them further with this ORPP.

I don't understand it. I don't think you people understand it. It's all political. It has nothing to do with what is right for the people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise and add comment to this as well.

I'd like to recognize the Associate Minister of Finance and some of the comments that she had about providing income security for Ontarians in their retirement years. Something that I've mentioned time and time again, when I've had an opportunity to get up and speak to the ORPP, is that we need to make sure that there's security for everyone, for those that work in the private sector who work 20, 25 or 30 years for a company and expect that there's a pension for them when they retire, only to have companies close up shop and move to another country, and now these people are without their pensions. So I think that the government needs to be looking at ways to secure their private pensions. We on this side are certainly in support of providing income security for all of Ontario. In fact, we think that this was something that could have been done through an enhancement to the CPP at the federal level. But because that hasn't been addressed now, we're looking at doing it at the provincial level.

Something else that's notable is that the cost of living has gone up. So not only do we need to make sure that everyone in Ontario has money for their retirement and can live comfortably, but we need to make sure that living is affordable. What we're seeing from the other side—from the government side—is that they are now looking to privatize hydro. That's certainly not going to help when we already have skyrocketing bills. We have—not just seniors—but, largely, seniors who are struggling to decide whether to keep the heat and lights on or whether they're going to eat for that day. Frankly, that's shameful. I would hope that the government side recognizes that a move to privatize hydro is not going to help that; it's going to make it harder for those in their retirement to be able to live comfortably.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: At the outset, I'd like to commend the Associate Minister of Finance, the Honourable Mitzi Hunter. I felt privileged to pinch-hit as her

parliamentary assistant to lead this particular bill, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, while also serving as PA to the Premier. I'd like to thank her staff member, Tiffany Blair, for educating me and allowing me to really immerse myself in the many, many different parameters.

If I might, Speaker—with your permission—just add perhaps what I would call a medical slant to this: We are in danger—or perhaps a privilege—of outliving our money, our savings. An individual born in the province of Ontario in 1900 had a life expectancy of approximately 40 to 50 years of age. An individual born today, as the minister has quite rightly cited, has something on the order of—and, of course, women always exceed it by four to five years, for reasons unknown—85 or 90 years. If a working life extends, for example, to 55 or 65—whatever the number is, and of course that too floats—we are now looking at approximately one third of our life on this planet without a stream of income. That is the reason, the basis, for the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

We, of course, on the government side would have been very pleased and honoured to work with other levels of government—most appropriately, of course, the Harper-Duffy Conservatives, but that was something not available to us. Our Premier—it took an entire year for them to even have face time, let alone negotiation time. As the Premier has very rightly said, if Stephen Harper will not lead the way, he must get out of the way. And Ontario is stepping up to the plate.

1400

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I wanted to comment on the Associate Minister of Finance, but a couple of other members threw some acerbic remarks in there. Anyway, I'll rise to the occasion, and I won't bother commenting on those.

This is nothing but a tax grab, as one of the other members said. Many members of the CFIB oppose it. A number of other individuals in the private sector oppose it. I'm going to go and visit with one of the Liberal members when they go back to their ridings. I'd love to sit in—if they do go; maybe they go somewhere else, and they don't go home.

But I know what I hear in my riding from people who are seniors and who are worried that they can't afford these hydro prices that go up and other taxes that are increased. So, yes, if there's a concern out there by seniors that they're not going to be able to afford to live, the government should look in the mirror and look at themselves because this government, by a lot of their spending shenanigans, has contributed to that fear.

You've got eHealth, you've got Ornge, you've got the gas plant debacle—billions of dollars out the door. Taxpayers in this province who are still working have been left to pay for these debacles. Then you've got individuals who are concerned. I'm sure there are people who are concerned. I get older every day, myself. I'm approaching that as well.

I don't understand how they can go home to their ridings and look their constituents in the face; I honestly can't believe they do. I think they must go somewhere else in disguise, and they don't go back home, because I can't believe that their own residents, their own voters, won't hound them out of office. What they've done for the last 12 years—they should be ashamed of themselves. I don't mind saying so. I've been here and have witnessed a lot of it in the last eight years. They can say whatever they want, but the proof is in the pudding. That's exactly what's going on with this government. They're a debacle. They're a waste of time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the Associate Minister of Finance for her final comments.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the member for Windsor West, the member for Etobicoke North and even the member from Sarnia–Lambton for their comments.

I want to say that Bill 56 is about our government's commitment to establishing the ORPP for January 2017. This is about our collective futures; 75% of Ontario workers between the ages of 25 and 34 have no workplace pension plan. This is what government does at its best. It is about building Ontario up. This is about our collective futures.

When you think about it, with our younger workers, they might not even recognize what a pension is if it's something that, once they enter the workforce, they've never interacted with. We need to define what a pension is. I think the member from Sarnia–Lambton, when he says that it's a tax, is absolutely incorrect. This is not a tax. A pension, if you look it up in the dictionary, is actually contributions that are made by a worker, matched by their employer, and it is there for them in their retirement. This is part of their deferred compensation. This is a benefit to the workers in Ontario.

I would invite all members of this Legislature to really think about that mobile workforce of the future who will need a pension when they retire. We don't want people to retire without adequate income, because that has the potential to be destructive to our economy. We know that when people don't have adequacy in retirement that puts pressure on publicly funded programs. This is about our collective futures. This is about taking action now to ensure that our future seniors will have the adequate retirement income that they have worked for and that they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's with recognition and respect for the public trust that I again enter in today's debate. I stand in my place today to speak against Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act.

I wish I could say I was hopeful that the Premier and her government members would listen, understand and adopt some of our recommendations—actually one out of 50 passed; one amendment—but this government gives me no reason to be hopeful. It has ignored speakers at

public hearings, ignored the small, medium and large business communities, ignored financial advisers, ignored the fundamental structural budget deficit they are actually feeding and ignored the people of Ontario when they say that clearly they cannot afford any more increases in the cost of living. To many, Bill 56 is a decision point: Do they stay in Ontario or leave for a lower-cost jurisdiction?

To clear the air, I want to dispel three main points the government cites in support of their proposed Ontario pension. The government has nearly succeeded in mischaracterizing the debate around retirement income security, but if you actually think about what members are repeating, their proof points do not make sense.

Without the requisite cost-benefit analysis that usually accompanies the proposal stage of such a fiscal initiative, we are asked to base our support on emotional arguments. By not coming forth with real data on this initiative, the Liberals succeed in capturing the hearts and minds of Ontarians who are anxious about their own retirement.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, I forgot to say that I would be sharing my time with the member from Haldimand–Norfolk and the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

The justification points: 65% of Ontarians don't have a workplace pension. This tells us nothing about how Ontarians, as a whole, are saving for their retirement. There are many, many ways by which individuals have chosen to save for their retirement.

Every year people do not contribute to the maximum to the RRSP. This tells us nothing about how Ontarians, as a whole, are saving. Again, there may be tax reasons why they're not. There may be many other complications not to have the full complement of funding for the RRSP.

Studies show that our economy 40 years from now will struggle if retirees do not have adequate income to spend. This is not an argument for a pension plan; it's an argument for sound economic policies. You have to ask yourselves: When does the health of tomorrow's economy trump the health and well-being of today's economy? When is it okay to sacrifice the jobs of today for the jobs of tomorrow? Never, actually, and today's economy needs help. The last decade has seen the largest increase in the cost of doing business in Ontario in history, all because of this government's policies.

Frequently the comparison is made between the Ontario pension and the Canada Pension Plan, suggesting that it will operate in much the same way, but this is not true because of the difference in the economy of scale that's achieved by the CPP, which allows it to provide a solid long-term return on investment. People have talked about the fact that a pension needs 40 years to mature to be able to offer the long-term support that it demands, so just even on the basis of that, it pales in comparison to the CPP. I'm hoping that I will have the opportunity later to offer a couple of other important comparisons.

From the introduction of this pension scheme, we in our caucus have raised issues. First of all, the government hasn't provided a plan, which is something that you

would think is pretty basic. As a result of no plan, all that happens is questions. Questions abound, but with no answers. Employers have told the government that the mandatory financial contributions will cost jobs, and we know jobless people can't pay into or collect a pension. Employers and employees alike will have less money in their pockets, reducing their purchasing power now.

1410

People want choice in their spending priorities and in their saving methods. The ORPP robs Ontarians of that choice. It is clear to those who understand what's at stake that this pension scheme must be abandoned. Instead, we find ourselves now in third reading of Bill 56, the ORPP, amid huge uncertainty. I have chosen that as the theme for a number of opportunities to speak because of the fact that this is something about which people want to know a great deal, and instead, there are no answers; there are just questions.

I began, last week, when the budget came out, to look and see what was here in the budget document on the direction of the government with regard to the pension. For anyone interested, this is actually—the section is pages 131 to 158. I'm going to just begin this conversation with a couple of examples to give credence to my point about the question of the planning.

In the introduction on page 131, one of the terms that they use is “eligible Ontarians.” We don't even know who that means. We don't know at what age, for how long, what kind of employment—is it part-time, full-time, any time?—or what kind of details there are in terms of what might constitute an eligible Ontarian.

Going further, the paper discusses the fact that “the government has taken ... decisive actions to fulfil the commitments made in the 2014 budget.” But we find, when we look at last year's document, that it amended the Pension Benefits Act to provide a legislative framework for the voluntary conversion of public sector single-employer pension plans into jointly sponsored plans. That tells us nothing about the private sector; that says that there's a change in the public sector. This bill has been presented to us as something that is of interest and of concern to the private sector.

It says, going on from there, “As part of its continuing progress to enhance retirement income security for all Ontarians”—now it's all, not just eligible—“the government announces the following measures” in the budget.

The second bullet point is the appointment of an expert committee. I think that happened this morning, actually. This expert committee is charged with the responsibility of considering “more tailored regulation of financial advisers, including financial planners. By enhancing regulation of the financial advice sector, the government can help consumers build a more secure retirement.” It isn't actually—I don't believe—part of a mandatory pension plan by the government. It does respond to many concerns about the need for financial literacy education.

The next part that I think bears some attention is on page 138. It describes it as the “New Ontario Pension

Plan.” I didn't know we had an old one. Here, it says, “Through mandatory contributions, the ORPP would provide a secure retirement income ... for eligible Ontario workers.” It's “intended to complement workplace and other voluntary retirement savings arrangements that will continue to play a critical role in helping Ontarians maintain their standard of living in retirement.”

This only adds to the confusion about who's in and who's out, and this uncertainty. How long will it take for individuals to be required to make contributions in order to receive benefits? For those who see this as an opportunity for a pension, there is also uncertainty because there's no idea how their money will be handled and how investment returns will be generated. We don't even know whether this ORPP is a Ponzi scheme fraught with intergenerational inequity whereby younger participants are paying for the older, soon-to-be-retired.

The lack of a plan has created further uncertainty as there is no definition of a “comparable workplace pension plan.” What will be the impact on the existing private sector pensions? Hundreds of thousands of people employed in Ontario have workplace pension plans that, together, amount to the trillions in assets.

In 12 hours of public hearings, we heard 41 speakers. It was clear that the majority who spoke were opposed for a variety of reasons. One concern raised is that, without exemptions, the ORPP may crowd out or eliminate existing pension plans and retirement savings. For many people, this may mean the ORPP provides no net increase to savings or may even reduce their retirement assets.

Without a clear plan, it's impossible to evaluate, only speculate. For that, I want to give you some further introduction to some of the key ideas that are provided here.

As I read a moment ago, mandatory contributions—and it is “intended to complement workplace and other voluntary retirement savings,” which is a hint maybe about the direction but certainly nothing that is going to give people a great deal of confidence in that regard.

But before January 2017, the budget papers tell us, “the province will also introduce legislation that would finalize details of the plan, based on extensive actuarial and legal analysis and ongoing engagement with Ontarians.” So before it actually comes into play in January 2017, it says here that, prior to that, we're going to learn something about the details. But this is cold comfort for people who are concerned, as I have identified, with some of the issues that have remained unanswered. All we're going to know is that, before 2017, the government is going to announce some conclusions on the key design of the plan.

We then look at the one that has attracted the most attention, the most concern, and that is the question of the 1.9% contribution. Something that no one has been able to answer for me in terms of the details of this proposal is the fact that both the employer and the employee—their contribution is tax-exempt. So without a plan, we don't even know if the government has contemplated the

impact this would have on its own revenues. It's not a lot, but since it's mandatory it becomes a lot, and that's revenue that the government would normally get in a revenue stream, but now this will be exempt. I've no idea what this would mean—the exemptions—for millions of contributing workers and businesses. It may cost the provincial government tens of millions of lost or forgone tax revenue. People should know what the true value is and what the government is doing by creating this.

The other point, of course, is that you're left to ponder—again, I go back to speculate—how much will other taxes and fees have to be raised in order to cover this newly created budget revenue shortfall to appear in 2017?

1420

And we don't know about administration costs. How much will it cost to provide a stand-alone pension scheme—\$300 million, \$400 million? With no plan in place, it's back to speculation.

But it's interesting that the budget document is clearly moving forward with the creation of the administrative corporation. They may not know what matters most to individuals who feel the 1.9% coming out of their pocket, but the government is busy organizing the administrative arm.

I think we're allowed to demonstrate a bit of skepticism on that file because every other arm's-length institution that the government has managed to find ways to create scandal and misuse of funds and things like that—here's another one.

What does the government say about that? Well, on page 148 there is the beginning of this information on the creation of the administrative corporation. I really want to emphasize that, because we're going to start with the highest-priced people in the process. We don't know anything about the details on how it's going to affect unemployment in this province, but we are going to have experts and, I guess, a capital budget as well for where this will be housed.

But here's what it says in the budget document: "Ontario is a global leader in pension administration and management...."

"Building on the best attributes of these models"—that is, CPP and the teachers' as world-class pension plans—"and the framework in Bill 56, Ontario is introducing legislation that would establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Administration Corporation"—this is where we have to put in the big pot of money to be able to create an administration—"a professional, independent pension organization that would be responsible for administering the ORPP. The government envisions the" Ontario pension administration corporation "as evolving into one of the world's leading pension organizations." Well, that's certainly a tall order.

"To support the ORPP's strong governance framework, the government would put in place a focused interim board"—we've got to hire them and pay them to be the interim board—"to oversee the implementation" of the permanent board.

"If the legislation passes, the province expects to name an interim chair ... in the coming months." So we're going to make sure that we've got the people at the top hired before we can even answer the simplest questions to the average Joe whose pocket is being picked. I think that that demonstrates in itself the kind of priority that this government has.

Oh, and I left out another part of what has to happen: "One of the government's initial implementation priorities is to identify potential providers"—we've got to have those people as well—"that could help deliver a simple, reliable and cost-effective pension service-delivery system...." Well, I hope it's not the eHealth gang and I hope it's not the SAMS people. I hope they found somebody else who actually knows how to do this.

"At this time, the government is assessing a range of service-delivery options for pension administration. As part of this process, the province is proceeding with a procurement to identify potential third-party service-delivery providers for the ORPP." So we now have to have somebody who is in charge of—well, they have to be appointed and paid, and delivered—and probably letterhead, and a few other thousand, multi-thousand, a million dollars to be able to provide a procurement to identify potential third-party service deliverers.

That's kind of what it looks like when you look at the budget of last week. I want to read one of the closing remarks here: "The government is committed to a smooth transition to the ORPP." Obviously, after they got all that high-priced help engaged in this, it should.

"For example, the province will provide employers and employees with regular updates on implementation and will ensure a simplified process to minimize administrative costs." So far, we don't have a really good track record with this government on meeting those kinds of objectives.

"In addition, the government will continue to work with the business community, pension plan administrators, labour and other impacted stakeholders to create a plan that reflects the needs of Ontarians." Well, I think that one of the things that Ontarians need is a government that is actually committed to creating a climate for investment and creating jobs in this province, and I think that that actually might be more productive than getting in very expensive help to search for more expensive help to make sure that one committee is able to do that.

All of this, again, leaves so much open to uncertainty. I think it's very interesting that they are going to keep businesses and other stakeholders in the loop, but that's really not what they want. They want to know what's happening on the ground, so to speak.

My remarks today reflect the genuine concern that I and my caucus colleagues share about this proposal and its effect on the well-being of Ontarians. We know through public discourse, businesses from around the province and even a Ministry of Finance document that this proposal is actually a job killer. The ministry document states that with every \$2 billion that the ORPP receives in contributions, 18,000 jobs will be lost. That

amounts to approximately 54,000 jobs in Ontario in a year.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business forecasts the same negative impacts on our economy if the Ontario pension is installed. One constant is that no one is saying that the pension plan will help create jobs. The only new jobs will be in the public sector, obviously, creating another Taj Mahal and all the people who go with it, who have to get poached from the existing pension managers, the public-sector bureaucrats who will be needed to run the administration and the investment entities.

Small business has been assaulted by this government by increased red tape and matched increased fees and taxes. They don't have any financial cushion to absorb this proposal. Instead, they see a government bent on squeezing more money from them through increased hydro rates, mandatory pension contributions and a carbon tax, to name but a few. Businesses can only pay these when they make a profit. More and more these days, businesses are unable to make a profit; they close their shop or move away.

Casualties of this government's failed direction, the newly jobless, join the province's unemployed ranks of over 500,000 people. I remind the Premier that Ontario's jobless rate has been the worst in the country for the last six years. The last thing Ontario needs is any plan that threatens to kill jobs, never mind actually is a plan to kill jobs. Premier, unemployed people, people who will have to shutter their businesses—these are the people whose lives will be drastically affected by your pension scheme.

Mr. Speaker, I hope this government has listened to my remarks today and those of my colleagues. We bring the voice of reason, not just emotion, to this debate. I'd ask the members of the House to vote against this bill with me. It will be another burden at best, and perhaps another boondoggle at worst.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Continuing along, I recognize the member from Haldimand-Norfolk.

1430

Mr. Toby Barrett: It's certainly a pleasure to follow the member from York-Simcoe. I will mention, Speaker, that I will be sharing my time with the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, who also has done a tremendous amount of work on this file, on the finance committee and as our finance critic a number of years ago.

As we debate the advisability of this pension plan this afternoon, we bear in mind that this government is doing its best to try to get its hands on as much revenue as possible through new so-called "revenue tools"—this is one of the more recent phrases that has arrived in this august body—because the government is spending so much money, and basically they're having trouble meeting payroll. They talk about the money going to the subways in Toronto. That's fine. I know that goes over like a lead balloon down in Haldimand county. I spent a fair bit of time down there on the weekend, and there is no public transit in Haldimand county. Our need is culverts, bridges, roads and highways.

We recognize that this pension proposal is a way to accrue more revenue. The government will have to start writing cheques 30 or 40 years down the road, but it's going to get this government through in the interim.

It's a tax. It's a tax on employers; it's an tax on employees. It's the same kind of tax, essentially, as all of the other taxes.

Carbon tax, for example: We're going to see that on the pumps, whether you're buying gasoline or diesel. It's going to hit natural gas and heating oil. In the discussion of carbon tax they've dragged out that phrase again: "cap-and-trade." When I think of the phrase "cap-and-trade," what comes to my mind is cap-and-trade jobs to China. That's what's going to continue to happen with that one.

By selling carbon credits—it's confusing enough for people to understand, but that's going to bring in about \$2 billion. That's a pretty significant revenue tool, \$2 billion from the cap-and-trade system to this Ontario government—again, to try to meet payroll because of the negotiated settlements around wages, salaries, pensions, holiday time, benefits, sick time; the kinds of things that accrue to public servants that do not accrue to those doing similar work in the private sector.

Now, we know about, yet again, one of the more recent taxes on electricity. There have been so many increases, people can't pay the bills down my way. In fact, a lot of people do their best not to use electricity. They have to try to heat their house with wood now. I know personally I went through 20 cords of wood last winter, because I heat with electricity. Year by year, under this present government, my home's thermostat has been turned down lower and lower and lower.

The beer tax: Okay, that's one that they did acknowledge in the budget. That's about the only one they came right out and made clear. They're increasing the tax on beer. That's no small amount of money. That's going to suck \$100 million out of people who drink beer, people who maybe cannot afford high-priced scotch or high-priced wine. So they're going to be dinged for another \$100 million in taxes.

Part and parcel, this new pension proposal is to add more revenue in the short run. When I say "short run," maybe over the first 10, 20, 30 or even 40 years before the cheques really start flowing out to people.

It's Bill 56. We've debated a number of pieces of pension legislation here over the years. It's a payroll tax to fund the ORPP, the Ontario registered pension plan.

There's Liberal messaging that goes with this. I noticed this in the paper a few weeks ago. There was this quote to kind of justify this approach. It was crooning, essentially. It says, "When we share a little, we gain a lot." So, you know, pay some tax, and we gain a lot down the road. It may be 40 years from now before you or I, Speaker, start drawing on this particular pension.

It's estimated that this particular payroll tax is going to bring in something like \$3.5 billion a year. Granted, that is going to help tax-and-spend Liberals. There's no question about that. Maybe it will help hold off the

tremendously growing size of their deficit. It has grown every year for the last three years.

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I hear it's okay, just as long as I leave 10 minutes for the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

This is mandatory, Speaker.

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Good. I've got 29 minutes? Okay, that's fine.

The reality is that the ORPP is a mandatory pension plan; people are starting to realize now. It will see both employees and employers pay matching payroll taxes of 1.9% of the total salary of an employee; it goes into this pool. So there's a 3.8% tax. It's going to be a new tax. It's getting close to a 4% tax. You know, there is already a subtraction for the national program, the CPP program, as well. This is an add-on to that.

The result: Employees will see less money in their pocket, obviously, when they're paying another 1.9% of their salary to the Ontario government for this future plan. Take-home pay will decrease, obviously. This impacts spending priorities. There's less money to spend, to invest, to save, perhaps, for retirement. It's a threat to the small companies as well. We've certainly heard that feedback. It could be a threat to one's job, for that matter, if it's just that additional straw that may put a small business under. So it will impact spending priorities within our economy, like paying off your student loan or paying down a mortgage and additional discretionary spending.

As was mentioned, public hearings were held in late March on Bill 56, the legislation that brings in this plan. A number of employers told members on the committee that they saw this mandatory 1.9% employer contribution as a payroll tax. They couldn't afford it. Many presenters indicated that high electricity prices, increased WSIB rates, the increased minimum wage and red tape obviously all add on and contribute to the increased cost of doing business. I certainly heard that across the north in the last several days last week.

This is a pension payroll tax that is going to make Ontario businesses less competitive and, as we were told, will force some employers to reduce hours and cut staff. Some feel threatened, coupled with the increasing cost of electricity. They may leave for Ohio; they may leave for Michigan or just go out of business altogether.

Ministry of Finance documents: There's an estimate here that Ontario would lose something like 18,000 jobs with every \$2 billion collected by the ORPP payroll tax. I find it hard to believe why a government of any stripe would introduce a payroll tax, in this case disguised as a pension scheme, that would threaten jobs in the province of Ontario. That just seems to be the reality of the world we're living in now within this present provincial government.

We know there will be a new arm's-length agency that will administer the ORPP. We've seen the track history of a number of other agencies through this government—

Ornge air ambulance for one; eHealth; before that, the College of Trades comes to mind—that have severely eroded the trust of the people of Ontario in their government of Ontario.

I would ask everyone here to please turn to the legislation, turn to subsection 2(1). How is this money going to be raked in? First of all, "An administrative entity shall be established for the purpose of administering the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan."

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"Duties of the administrative entity

"(2) The duties of the administrative entity shall include the following:

"2. Collection of contributions: The administrative entity shall collect from eligible employers the contributions on behalf of the eligible employers and the eligible employees.

"3. Investing contributions: The administrative entity shall be responsible for investing the collected contributions for the benefit of the members and other beneficiaries of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan." We've got to hold them to that, Speaker.

I continue my quote:

"4. Holding contributions: The administrative entity shall hold the contributions, and any accruals from the investments, in trust for the members and other beneficiaries of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. The contributions and the accruals shall not form part of the Consolidated Revenue Fund."

As official opposition we asked, in the 2015 budget—we requested that this government demonstrate a commitment to abandon any thoughts of an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan altogether. There hasn't been a cost/benefit analysis, let alone a risk/benefit analysis, for that matter. There's no business plan to ensure that this idea makes any kind of sense at all in the first place.

The present government have floated this proposal. It's an idea. There is not a plan. They've set a target of a year and a half to race around all the companies and find out, "Well, what kind of plan do you have?" and, "Here's the new plan," and try to work out how this new plan can fit into their old plans, so that they can get the money that the employer was previously putting forward on behalf of the company and on behalf of their staff, their employees. I do put to this Legislature that this has not been thought through.

If we turn to the preamble of the bill, we read: "Canada and Ontario have a strong foundation of retirement benefit programs...." Many of us take advantage of these. Some are mandatory; some are voluntary. If we had a modicum of financial literacy being communicated in our school system, I think there would be a lot more people who, once they start working, would take advantage of so many of the other instruments out there to save for their own retirement, rather than depending on the state.

Some of the programs: obviously the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Annual Income System. I'll quote further: "However, as outlined

in Ontario's 2014 budget, several studies"—several studies; that's not a full literature review—"have shown that a significant portion of today's workers are not saving enough to maintain their standard of living when they retire. The reasons for this are varied: workplace pension coverage is low; individuals are not taking sufficient advantage of voluntary savings tools; and people are living longer than ever before."

I don't know whether this is seen as a problem for this government, that people are living longer. However, these aren't necessarily good reasons to add a 3.8% payroll tax.

I'll quote the preamble again. This is so odd, to read this in legislation. I really don't know whether this was written by a lawyer or a legislator, but I'll just quote. This is right in the bill: "After a lifetime of hard work, Ontarians deserve to feel financially secure in their retirement." Now, I've read a lot of legislation over the years; this seems to be really pushing it. Does this make it a law?

"Strengthening the retirement income system is not only important to Ontario families, it is critical to the future prosperity of the province." I wanted to read that out, to give credit to this government. I don't think a lawyer wrote that, but here's the reason given for this bill.

In Ontario, many employees participate in defined contribution pension plans, group RRSPs, tax-free savings accounts and other retirement savings vehicles. People buy property, improve property and flip property, sell houses, sell farms, build another one. There are other ways to save for retirement, not that we're going to make that a law.

Some defined contribution plans have higher rates than this particular pension proposal, so what would happen there? Obviously, the employer, when they have this choice before them, is going to reduce their contributions or maybe just walk away from the existing plan that the company had for a number of years, as it was.

As opposition, we aren't alone in our particular position on this. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce publicly lambasted the government for its lack of evidence-based decision-making: "At a minimum, the government of Ontario must conduct and publicly release an analysis of the impact of the new pension plan on foreign direct investment, job creation and Ontario's competitiveness."

Again, why would the government consider such a plan? People are better off working. We know that. Any job is a good job, in my view, and I've done a lot of different ones. You're better off working. You're better off saving toward your retirement—better than not earning anything. Any threat to employment, any threat to business that provides the employment in this province is not a good thing, and we point the finger at this particular proposal.

We know that under the present regime we have already lost something like 300,000 manufacturing jobs. So we've got a plan. It's expected, once it gets rolling, to

bring in \$3.5 billion to this government. Why else would they do this? And we do know that there are so many other public sector-generated pension plans that have billions of dollars of unfunded liabilities. I predict that's the future for this plan, if past behaviour is any predictor of future behaviour. That does not instill confidence, within the official opposition, in this particular proposal. We've got a proposal that is going to subtract 1.9% from people's paycheques. It's going to subtract 1.9% from the employer.

In last spring's budget—2014—the Premier unveiled this proposal for a payroll tax, particularly for those who don't have access to a company pension plan. It doesn't mean that they don't have access to other instruments of saving for their retirement. We know it's a top-up to the CPP, the Canada Pension Plan, but it will not cover those who are self-employed, those who already have pensions through their workplace or in a federally regulated place of employment—banking, telecommunications or transportation.

It only benefits those who are working. There's something like a million people who aren't working in the province of Ontario. They're either on welfare or disability. It could well be higher than that. I'll have to check the figures on that one. This government's war on poverty was a dud, as we know.

This is a proposal that does have business owners especially worried, as the pension program laid out before us right now again requires both employer and employee contributions. They begin in January 2017, so they've set a date a year and a half from now to cut the take-home pay of the worker and cut the bottom line of the particular business that they're working for.

Meridian Credit Union put out a report indicating that 77% of Ontario's entrepreneurs feel the ORPP will be the largest business challenge they've ever faced. They're fearful that the plan may negatively impact their own retirement plans, and that's also concerning in that 91% of those surveyed were concerned that the proposal before us here today would cut into their business profits. In the meantime, when that happens, then you've got to take a look at your hiring practices and your firing practices. You've got to take a look at your compensation program to prepare for the inevitable crunch.

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The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, CFIB, has dubbed the ORPP a "job killer." I know the member for York-Simcoe just indicated that earlier this afternoon, saying that payroll taxes force employers to lay off workers, cut hiring and, in many cases, move south of the border.

About 60% of Ontario workers don't have a company pension plan, but, again given this government's track record, people are not convinced that they're ready to trust this government with another \$3.5 billion a year. That's what this is all about. It's all about the \$3.5 billion a year—

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Cash grab.

Mr. Toby Barrett: —to suck out of the private sector—a cash grab, as was indicated by my colleague—

and transfer that money from the private sector to the public sector. Government unions like that.

As well, many without a pension plan are already doing their savings through the RSP program and the tax-free savings account program—thanks to the federal government, I think they just doubled the contribution for tax-free savings accounts—and, as I've mentioned, real estate holdings. We have the right here to own and improve property, and build up wealth through property and other investments—as I said, yet again another reason for a greater focus on mathematics courses in financial literacy in our school system.

Unfortunately, many of the same people can't save as much as they'd like, again because it goes out the other way because of the ever-increasing electricity rates, rising income taxes and beer taxes. They seem to be very proud of this \$100 million a year that will be subtracted from beer drinkers as of last Thursday's budget.

The HST, of course, and the forerunner to that, the so-called health tax, the largest income tax increase in the history of the province of Ontario and increased fees for services, whether you drive a vehicle or are into hunting or things like that—it's a cumulative effect—this has all hampered people's ability to save for retirement. They're already paying 4.9% of their pay into the federal CPP, the Canada Pension Plan, up to a maximum of \$2,356 a year. Employers have to match this. Now we've got the spinoff. It doesn't necessarily complement that; it's an add-on. The employer pays 1.9% payroll tax and the employee pays 1.9% payroll tax.

That's what this is all about: sucking money out of people who live in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Continuing on with debate, I recognize the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm really pleased to have a chance to speak to Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

Mr. Speaker, in the short time I have available, I really think this is about Ontario's trend towards the nanny state where we have bigger government and where government is taking more and more choice away from individuals and taking more of individuals' and families' money and making decisions for them rather than letting the individual or the family make the decision, and it keeps going on and on.

In this country, we have a pretty good system. We have the Canada Pension Plan. We have Old Age Security. We have the Guaranteed Income Supplement. For those at the lowest income levels, at retirement they tend to not see their income levels change too much because of the plans we do have.

The great majority of Ontarians are saving enough for retirement, so the question is: Is this pension plan really necessary? The federal government has said that when the economy improves they're going to expand the Canada Pension Plan. I think that makes sense. I really liked the doubling of the TFSA last week.

I look at my own son, Stuart, who is 27 and not making much money. I talk to him and encourage him to save, because the best thing you can do when you're trying to save for retirement is—the time value of money; the longer you do it, the easier it is to save for retirement. So despite him not making much money, we chatted with Stuart, saying, "You should either do an RRSP or a TFSA."

For somebody not making much money and not paying much tax, a TFSA makes the most sense because you don't get a tax benefit; he's not paying much income tax. TFSAs also give great flexibility. They don't have all of the rules around RRSPs, so when you do go to use it you don't pay any tax on it and you have total flexibility to do with it as you like. I'm really happy that the federal government doubled that in last week's budget.

In the short time I have available, I wanted to get on the record an article that really sums it up pretty well. It was written by Jack Mintz. It's entitled "Ontario's Really Bad Pension Scheme."

"The ORPP is an expensive and poorly targeted approach to support seniors. The government should focus with more precision to help the most vulnerable."

"The province of Ontario is soliciting comments on its proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP). A government consultation document raises several issues about the proposal, but none got to the key one: Is this pension plan needed at all?"

"The proposal is for Ontarians to pay a payroll tax of 3.8% of earnings up to \$90,000, half shared by the employer. The plan will provide 15% of earnings after retirement. For example, at \$20,000 in income, payroll taxes annually would total \$627 with a pension payment of \$2,848 (or \$238 per month) after 65 years of age. The ORPP payment will affect income taxes and income-tested benefits."

"Under the proposal, an employee enrolled in a 'comparable' defined benefit or target plan will not need to join the ORPP. Self-employed individuals will not be able to join the plan due to Income Tax Act limitations."

"The key issue is whether Ontarians are not saving enough. Ontario politicians maybe believe there's a problem, but what is the evidence?"

"The best research has been done by Statistics Canada and McKinsey with large surveys coming to similar conclusions. While it is agreed that some Canadians have insufficient replacement income at retirement, it's widely agreed that three-quarters to four-fifths of Canadians do well, even projected into the future. This suggests a scalpel is needed, not an ORPP sledgehammer."

"Canadians have been saving well over the years and there is little to presume that this behaviour has changed. Sure, interest yields are recently low but stock markets have come back since 2009. Low yields affect any saving plans including a government pension plan, which could run large unfunded liabilities. There are no magic bullets."

"Ontario's proposed mandatory pension scheme could do more harm than good."

"Based on data, not conjecture, a young Canadian buys a home with a mortgage and pays off most debt by

retirement. Housing equity is a significant asset of which its after-tax value is more than the combined value of Canada Pension Plan, Quebec Pension Plan, tax-assisted registered pension and retirement assets. Taking into account other financial and business assets held by Canadians, most Canadians do not need new mandatory saving plans. Some individuals require support but this has been provided by a combination of OAS, CPP/QPP, Guaranteed Income Supplement, provincial support programs, Medicare and low income taxes on seniors. It is far from clear an expansion of CPP, QPP or the ORPP is at all needed for the broad population.

"In fact, a mandatory Ontario pension plan could do more harm than good.

"First, once taking into account personal taxation and income-tested programs, the Ontario plan will discriminate against low-income seniors and some others in middle-class ranges.

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"Low-income seniors will be taxed on Ontario pension income as well as lose GIS payments, 50 cents on each dollar. For a senior with \$20,000 in income, barely above the measured poverty line, the Ontario pension plan will be reduced from \$2,848 to \$1,424 with the loss in GIS and a further \$584 by federal and provincial tax payments, leaving only \$740 to cover rent and food. While working, the person would pay the same payroll tax rate as others but would end up with a pretty lousy after-tax return on the asset.

"Seniors with more than \$71,592 will also be hurt by the clawback of federal OAS payments at 15 cents on each dollar of Ontario pension payment. Taking into account both this clawback and federal and Ontario income taxes, the Ontario pension payment is reduced by up to 55%!

"Second, any mandatory scheme has bad consequences for those who do not need it. Young families trying to save for home equity will need to pay into a plan that is a less important retirement asset at their stage of life. Others who invest in businesses and other financial opportunities will have to face new taxes. Employers looking to hire more workers will now pay a new tax even if they provide some alternative retirement benefit that is 'not comparable' to the Ontario plan, such as a defined contribution plan.

"Third, the Ontario plan will be expensive to operate, the reason Alberta decided not to run its own pension plan a decade and a half ago. Ontario will need to track migrants in and out of the province. It will also need to administer the plan on its own. It will also lead to large unfunded liabilities, adding on to provincial debt, if payroll taxes do not cover benefits.

"Fourth, by exempting those employers with comparable plans—defined benefit and target plans—labour markets will be distorted in favour of unionized employers where such plans are typically found. Also, capital markets would be distorted in favour of financial firms that can provide comparable plans.

"Finally, the Ontario government would have an enticing asset to use for industrial policy. Although the

budget proposal makes clear that the Ontario pension plan will operate on market-based principles, we already see ruminations to use funds to finance Ontario infrastructure. Pension" plans "have an interest to fund long-lived assets, anywhere in the world, but pressure from the Ontario politicians could undermine prudent investor behaviour.

"Governments do have a role in supporting our seniors. Poverty among ... seniors is extraordinarily high at 20%. Long-term care will be a serious issue in the future for many seniors living longer periods with ill health.

"The ORPP is an expensive and poorly targeted approach to support seniors. The government should focus with more precision to help the most vulnerable."

That was written by Jack Mintz. I think it states it fairly clearly.

In regard to the last point he made there, how many long-term-care-beds has this government built in the last 12 years? You can correct me if I'm wrong; I don't think you've built any in the last 12 years. Maybe that would be something that would have a definite benefit for those single seniors that he was referring to that are having difficulty. That would, obviously, be of huge, huge benefit to them, and yet, the government has built no long-term-care beds.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, what has the government been saying to justify this? They have been saying that 65% of Ontarians don't have a workplace pension. Well, this stat tells us nothing about how Ontarians as a whole are saving for their retirement. I'm one of that 65%, but I don't think I need the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. I was self-employed most of my life, so I had to rely on RRSPs and investments in our home and that kind of thing. There's lots of other people in that circumstance. So that statistic really tells you nothing. Every year, people do not contribute the maximum to their RRSP—well, I'm that person as well. I don't necessarily contribute the maximum to my RRSP, nor do I want to, because there are so many restrictions and rules that go along with an RRSP, it wouldn't be prudent to have all your retirement investment in an RRSP. Yet, that's another justification the government is using—a flawed logic for justifying this plan.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps in the response to the debate I'll get a chance to speak a little bit more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is now time for questions and comments.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise on behalf of the people I represent in London West to speak to the comments that were made by the members for York-Simcoe, Haldimand-Norfolk and Parry Sound-Muskoka about Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. I have to say that I disagreed with pretty much everything that was said by the three members to my right, with the exception of a couple of comments that I think bear highlighting.

The first is the comment about the need for coordination with CPP, OAS and GIS. Certainly I think that will

be a high priority for the implementation of this ORPP. In my community in London, we've seen a 300% increase in poverty among seniors who live in the city. We have a poverty rate that's 32% higher than the national average. And it's not just in London. Across Ontario, a report from the Ontario Association of Food Banks said that seniors and post-secondary students are the two groups of food bank users who are growing the fastest in this province. So there is a need to do something to address this level of poverty, particularly from the perspective of women. Senior women are twice as likely as senior men to end their years in poverty.

But the other point that was made by the members of the PC caucus is around the question of trust. I do think that that is a legitimate question: Can we trust this government to deliver? We've seen \$8 billion wasted on P3s. We saw a billion dollars wasted on the gas plants. We see the privatization of Hydro One, and it does raise some questions about trust.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: It's my pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this bill and to talk a little bit about what I'm hearing from, first off, my friends from the opposition, and of course what I'm hearing from the folks in my riding as well.

First off, I think it's important to talk about the importance of action today. Without action today, many of today's workers will face a decline in their living standards in retirement. I know my colleagues across the way in the Progressive Conservative Party really don't see that issue as important because their federal cousins have not taken a leadership role on this in a decade. In a decade, they've stood there in the House and have done nothing on this file. They talk about an increase in OAS when a senior can't even buy a pack of gum with the increase that they get from their federal cousins.

What we've seen is leadership on this side of the House, leadership to ensure that three million Canadians will be able to retire in dignity. I know my colleagues across the way don't worry about that.

They also don't worry about facts. We've seen 500,000 net new jobs created by this government since the recession—500,000 net new jobs. The CFIB, which they try to quote, has even increased our SME upgrade. We are doing a great job to ensure we're creating jobs in this province. We're helping small and medium-sized enterprise, and we're also making sure that we are looking after our workers and our seniors in this province.

I know it's hard for them on that side of the House to think about that, but they need to start picking up the phone and maybe talking to their federal cousins, because you know what? A 64-cent increase on OAS doesn't do it. A CPP increase by the federal government would actually help everyone across the country, and would help us—all of our workers—moving forward into the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It gives me great pleasure to stand and comment on the speeches by my colleagues in our caucus. This is all about a tax grab. That's all it is. This government has run out of money. They can't manage their finances, so we have to come up with what the Premier calls a revenue tool. Those two words scare the daylight out of me and scare the daylight out of the people in my constituency, because they know that means more taxes.

Wouldn't it be great if we had hydro bills that were able to compete with the rest of Canada? Maybe people would be able to save some money, but they can't.

The College of Trades: What another perfect example of government mismanagement, taking money out of people in my riding, and certainly in Ontario.

Then we've had scandal upon scandal upon scandal, OPP investigations—this is just incredible. And this has only happened in the last three years with the OPP investigations. Ornge was ongoing, and eHealth, the gas plants—the list goes on.

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This government expects the people of Ontario to put another tax in, and they're supposed to trust them with their money again—up to \$3 billion a year, I believe I heard. That's incredible. That's a matter of trust. If we could trust this government to do the right thing with this money and make sure that the money is there when people retire, maybe it would be a different story, but it's not there. The trust factor is not there.

There is no business plan to this scheme. There is no cost-benefit plan to this scheme. In fact, there is no plan—period—for this other than to raise money for some of their infrastructure schemes. That's all it is. It's a money grab, pure and simple.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in this House, and today to provide some comments on An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and to follow the hour lead from the Tories.

I'm torn on this, I have to say. We fully agree that we need the ORPP. I think it would be much better if we could roll it into the CPP because the ORPP by itself has some problems. Where we run into problems with this whole issue—quite frankly, my colleague from London—

Ms. Peggy Sattler: West.

Mr. John Vanthof: London West—used the perfect word: It's a trust issue. A lot of the people in my riding and, I think, across the province lack trust that this government will actually follow through.

The member from Sudbury was very eloquent in talking about seniors. I agree. Do you want to talk about the seniors in my riding? At this point, some of them are being forced out of their houses because they can't pay their hydro bills. That's not a federal issue; that's a provincial issue. When you want to talk about an issue of trust, I know that those people had a level of trust when

they heard things like “unlocking the value.” No one at the time of the election said, “One thing you’re going to have to trust us on is, we’re going to sell Hydro One. We don’t think your rates are going to go up. We don’t think more of you are going to be thrown out of your houses because you can’t afford to heat your houses.”

That’s why the people in my riding and the people in rural Ontario need more than this. They need the trust factor where they can actually trust this government to follow through, which they haven’t done so far.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the official opposition: I recognize the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for final comments.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the members from London West, Sudbury, Perth–Wellington and Timiskaming–Cochrane for their comments.

I’ll start off with, do you trust this government to be able to effectively run a pension plan based on the way they’ve run a few other things? You just have to look at how they ran the smart meter program. It was supposed to cost \$1 billion, and it cost \$2 billion, and it didn’t have any effect on people conserving electricity.

I really do believe if the government stopped coming up with new taxes and left a little more money in people’s pockets, they’d be able to save for retirement. But the nanny state is alive and well in Ontario. The government just keeps taking more and more money, whether it’s in the form of taxes or through their schemes that take away the disposable income of the average person.

Look at electricity rates. It was just announced that they’re going up another 16% come May 1. That’s a huge, huge issue, particularly in rural and northern Ontario, where people are afraid to open their hydro bills. Maybe if the government ran the electricity system a little better, people would have some money left to be able to put in to an RRSP or TFSA or to buy a home and build some equity. But they just keep coming up with new taxes, now a carbon tax and a beer tax.

We all remember when the Minister of Energy talked about the Green Energy Act and said that it was going to be a 1% increase in your electricity bills. That has turned out to be far, far, far from true.

Do we trust the government to run this pension plan? How much is the new bureaucracy going to cost? Are people really going to be better off? I don’t think so. That’s why I certainly can’t support this pension plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the opportunity to speak to this bill once again. This will be my second hour lead on Bill 56. As the government has decided to split the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan into three bills, there will be many more hours to follow. Fortunately, it is a topic with a lot of area for discussion, and there are few things I would rather speak about than pensions.

Not much has changed since we last discussed this bill at second reading. We’ve gone through the committee

stage, held public hearings and reviewed the legislation clause-by-clause, but almost every amendment was voted down by the government and the bill has progressed largely in its original form. Of course, because this isn’t the most substantive piece of legislation, there also wasn’t much to change, so it’s not that surprising that what began as a shell has remained a shell throughout.

That being said, I appreciate the opportunity today to discuss the process, to go over some of the great ideas we heard presented during the public hearings, to make note of the various amendments we proposed that the government couldn’t be bothered to adopt, and to remind the government that there are still a lot of questions to be answered about the design details of the ORPP and we want to make sure they answer them correctly.

As the Ontario NDP critic for pensions, I am always honoured to rise and speak on behalf of the two thirds of Ontarians who do not have a workplace pension plan and on behalf of all Ontarians as they plan and prepare for their retirement, whether it is four months down the road or in four decades. All Ontarians deserve the right to retire with dignity, and it is our job as members of provincial Parliament to do whatever we can to help along the way. I believe this wholeheartedly, and I hope the government does as well.

When an individual benefits from a secure retirement, we all benefit. Our society benefits. Our economy benefits. I could spend the next hour just listing ripple effects that ensuring retirement has, from increased discretionary spending to decreased social service and health care costs.

Retirement security is not a goal for our society; it is a necessity. It is the difference between our province struggling and our province thriving. It is the difference between looking 40 years ahead and falling 40 years behind. This is about looking out for the youth of today, when they become the seniors of tomorrow.

But we can’t get there on platitudes alone. Like all things, the devil is in the details, and the government left most of the details out of Bill 56. The day it was introduced, we heard a lot of lofty language from the government about the ORPP, but saw far more action on the PRPPs that they’ve co-opted from the Harper government. Naturally, Mr. Speaker, you can understand why we remain concerned and why we are watching the government so intently. They said all the right things about addressing our retirement security crisis, but we want to make sure they go about it in the right way.

Today, I will talk about how we’ve gotten to where we are, and where we need to go. All Ontarians deserve the right to retire with dignity. Now we just need make that belief a reality.

I would like to take this opportunity to share parts of the summary of Bill 56 hearings. The summary was “prepared to assist members in their deliberations and in their clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. It is not a complete historical record of all the evidence heard by the committee, nor a comprehensive review of the arguments made by witnesses. Accordingly, comments have been abbreviated and recommendations summarized.

Submissions expressing substantially the same point of view have been grouped together.”

Since the government didn't seem to take these comments and suggestions to heart during committee, they might at least take them in here today. We heard from stakeholders with many and varied perspectives and fields of reference. We heard comments and suggestions on contributions, the determination of contributions on the contribution rate and on the phase-in of contribution rates. We heard a lot about employee eligibility. And as we've heard from the Conservatives, we heard from very different and divergent perspectives. That's the point.

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This was my first time following a bill through committee. While it was a personally valuable exercise, we don't see that the bill was strengthened by the process. Certainly, the government seemed determined to stick to its original plan without meaningful consideration of other options and improvements. So I am pleased to share some of those other options and improvements from many of those invested and passionate stakeholders. Here are some comments and suggestions around the idea of eligibility of employees that I am citing from the summary:

The exemption for comparable plans under subsection 2(1) should be removed.

If the employee exemption is not removed, then the criteria for exemption should be a list of specific criteria that ensures that robust defined-benefit and defined-contribution plans are exempt. This would focus the ORPP on those with few or no additional retirement savings.

Well, Mr. Speaker, while we recognize that there are many strong DC plans out there, and we did hear from a number of them during the hearings, to say that any or all should be excluded doesn't support the idea of a strong and reliable benefit into retirement. The contribution side of things isn't what we should be comparing, especially if we're going to look at plans to be exempt. We should be looking at the benefit. As I have said before, to think that people and their plans are at the mercy of the market—I don't think that is what we should aim for. It is defined-benefit plans that are going to provide that predictable, more secure benefit. That is the nature of them. Ultimately, we do hope that the ORPP is going to be designed to provide the most secure and most predictable benefit to the most people.

Some of the comments and recommendations that I would also like to share include suggestions on possible additions to the proposed ORPP. I have a list of them here, also from the summary:

The government should take measures to offset the cost of contributions for the most economically vulnerable, possibly through a refundable tax credit.

The ORPP should be coordinated with support programs such as the Guaranteed Income Supplement to help poor Ontarians in particular.

The ORPP must be arm's-length from the government and focus on getting the best return for members, not other policy objectives.

The provincial government should work with the federal government to make legislative changes to allow the self-employed to join the ORPP.

The design of the ORPP must ensure that this benefit does not remove Old Age Security or Guaranteed Income Supplement benefits.

As part of the ORPP, Ontario must reach an agreement with the federal government to ensure it gains the same favourable tax treatment as the CPP. Otherwise, there will be negative implications for taxes and retirement savings.

The government should add a two- to four-year review period following implementation to determine if there are any unintended consequences.

The ORPP should account for part-time and contract workers to ensure they benefit as well.

Finally, the ORPP should mirror the CPP's administrative requirements as closely as possible to minimize the burden on businesses.

Mr. Speaker, we also heard arguments on universal coverage versus exemptions for the ORPP. Again, I have a list I'd would like to share from the summary, voices from stakeholders that, unfortunately, we don't see reflected in the changes in the bill:

The ORPP should provide universal coverage to make it more compatible with the Canada Pension Plan in the event that it can be added into a future CPP expansion.

Defined-benefit pension plans are not always lucrative enough for retirees to survive on, and employees with them should not be exempted from ORPP contributions.

A universal ORPP would be simpler and cheaper to administer than a pension system that allows for exemptions for comparable plans.

A universal ORPP would provide portability and fairness, and reduce pension envy from those who lack retirement savings.

Any exemptions for comparable plans must account for differences in employment, including contract, part-time and short-term work.

A universal plan creates fewer labour market distortions than an ORPP that allows some plans to be exempt. Exempting certain plans but not others will create a competitive disadvantage for some firms and workers.

If the ORPP allows exemptions, it may create a problem of negative selection, where more well-off workers with existing pensions would opt out, while the less well-off remain.

Unless it is made universal, the ORPP is not a public pension plan; it is simply a workplace pension scheme run by the government.

I will continue with recommendations from the summary. In arguments for mandatory versus voluntary contributions:

The ORPP should be a voluntary, rather than mandatory, program.

In the current economic climate, people do not have the disposable income to contribute to existing voluntary retirement schemes such as RRSPs and PRPPs. A

mandatory plan such as the ORPP ensures retirement savings.

The ORPP must be mandatory to allow interest to accumulate over workers' entire careers and to build a sufficiently secure pool of assets.

So you see, Mr. Speaker, we heard a lot of diverse opinions. In fact, I have more. In positive consequences of implementing the ORPP, drawn from the summary:

All businesses and organizations, large and small, will be able to provide retirement benefits to their employees.

The ORPP allows for a larger pool of contributions to share risk and allow workers to keep secure retirement savings even if they change jobs.

If properly modelled on the Canada Pension Plan, the ORPP will provide good returns with management fees that are lower than private alternatives.

The ORPP will provide more portable and reliable savings than current workplace plans and RSPs.

The ORPP can provide a significant benefit to groups who have limited retirement savings such as new immigrants, youth, the self-employed and high-skilled workers who do not save enough.

A defined benefit plan, such as the ORPP, will provide more predictable benefits for future retirees.

Implementing the ORPP now will increase retirement security for many Ontarians, reducing the pressure for government to provide support for retirees funded by tax revenues.

The ORPP will help provide an adequate retirement income for more Ontarians, which can lead to better health outcomes.

Many pension plans are already at risk; the ORPP would provide a protected source of retirement savings to help address that vulnerability.

And guess what, Mr. Speaker? There are more comments and suggestions that we heard in the hearings, and I'd like to continue to share them. A collection of other suggestions for improving retirement savings:

Before proceeding with the ORPP, the government should first fix existing pension problems, such as issues arising from pension splitting in the late 1990s.

The pension system needs to serve the disadvantaged and better account for special cases with extra hardship.

It would be preferable to expand the Canada Pension Plan instead of introducing the ORPP. The ORPP is a second-best option.

We did also hear from the other side of the pension debate. I know we hear the same arguments from our PC colleagues. We've heard that rather than establish the ORPP, it would likely be more effective to encourage workers to pay down debt or increase their personal savings. We also have heard that the government would be better off by prioritizing financial literacy for Ontarians possibly through the provincial curriculum.

While it's interesting to hear all of the different perspectives on the issue of retirement security, I would ask: How can we afford not to have a pension plan and retirement security for those who are struggling with the burden of existing in this province right now? More than

hydro—and I'm more than happy to talk about hydro, if you like—we have those struggling with student debt and barely, if at all, affordable childcare and housing. We recognize that life in Ontario is very expensive and challenging. But imagine that retirement if there aren't safeguards in place, if people don't have predictable income streams into their retirement. Imagine the burden on them and how little they will be able to contribute financially and personally in their local economy and in their communities.

If public hearings are where we listen and learn from the experts and stakeholders about what we need to do to improve legislation, clause-by-clause consideration is where we turn those lessons into law, or at least that is how it's supposed to work, though that may only apply during a minority government. Instead, what we saw was a package of amendments from the NDP and the Conservatives voted down one after the other after the other after the other—minus one PC amendment—because apparently the bill, and this may surprise you, was nearly perfect as it was.

1530

I will also note that no amendments were proposed by the Liberal government, even after travelling consultations and multiple days of public hearings.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I guess they must have knocked it out of the park on the first try. I tend to believe, however, in listening to input from others—

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Just not right now.

I tend to believe in listening to input from others, and feel that it was a missed opportunity by the government to not take the consultation and public hearings process more seriously. I know I found that the presenters had some excellent ideas, many of which became the foundation of the amendments we would eventually put forward and then eventually have voted down.

If you will indulge me, Mr. Speaker, I would like to go over a few of our amendments today in the hopes that the government will keep them in mind and consider them for the next two bills on the ORPP, as they actually start to roll out details—we hope—of the plan. Amendment number 1: I moved that the preamble to the bill be amended

“(a) by striking out ‘new mandatory provincial pension plan’ in the third paragraph and substituting ‘new mandatory, universal, defined benefit provincial plan’;

“(b) by striking out ‘and would build on key features of the Canada Pension Plan’ and substituting”—

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Robert Bailey): A point of order by the member.

Mr. Steve Clark: I thought I just heard the member for Oshawa move a motion. Are we going to deal with that motion here as part of third reading?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Robert Bailey): I think the member from Oshawa can continue. I think she was just making a point for debate.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I can go back and read that section again for the member.

Mr. Steve Clark: You said “I move.”

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I did say that “I moved,” but before that, I said, “If you would indulge me, Mr. Speaker”—and I’ll repeat this happily for my Conservative colleague—“I would like to go over a few of the NDP amendments today that we had proposed in clause-by-clause so that the government will take them into consideration over the next two bills on the ORPP.” So hopefully we will see—

Mr. Steve Clark: I thought we were dealing with some motions.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: “I moved,” is what I said.

I moved that the preamble bill to the bill be amended—and I will skip section (a) because it’s already on the record. Section (b)—

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: This is just like my classroom.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay, section “(b) by striking out ‘and would build on key features’”—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Robert Bailey): Order. I want to hear the member from Oshawa. She’s making some good points. I’d like to hear it.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Section “(b), by striking out ‘and would build on key features of the Canada Pension Plan’ and substituting ‘would build on key features of the Canada Pension Plan and would mirror the Canada Pension Plan’s participation rules’; and

“(c) by striking out ‘administered by an entity’ in the fourth paragraph and substituting ‘administered by an independent entity’.”

Now, because this amendment was for the preamble, it is largely symbolic. But a lot of what we do in this chamber is symbolic, and there are some important points here. Because we are continuing to wait for the vast majority of the details on the ORPP, we want to ensure that the government at least has the right—or rather, the left—ideals in mind as they roll the design out.

If the purpose of the plan is to provide the greatest level of stability and security to Ontarians in retirement in the most efficient way possible, then the ORPP needs to be a universal, defined benefit, mandatory plan. It is also imperative that the plan more than just build on the Canada Pension Plan and it is actually designed to be easily integrated as well.

Speaker, I know that our primary concern as members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario is to look out for Ontarians, but as Canadian public servants, we sometimes need to expand our scope. All Canadians deserve the right to security in retirement. There is no better way to ensure that than through an expansion of the CPP. We want to make sure that the ORPP helps, not hurts, the likelihood of such an expansion. It would be a tragedy if five, 10, 15 years from now, the federal government wanted to expand the CPP but discovered that our largest

province was opposed because the ORPP could not be effectively integrated.

The ORPP is meant to be a catalyst for CPP expansion, not a new obstacle, and we can’t allow our actions to deny retirement security to millions.

And like the CPP, we want to ensure that the ORPP’s investment board is administered independently of the government, to ensure that the interests of pensioners are the only interests that are considered when investments are made.

I’d like to read the second amendment that I made—past tense—in clause-by-clause, for the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I’m listening now.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Just a heads-up.

I moved that section 2 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

“Independence

“(1.1) The organization of the administrative entity shall be similar in principle to that of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board and its directors, officers, employees and agents shall not be part of the provincial public administration.”

This amendment comes in response to the vast concern that the government views the ORPP as its own personal slush fund in the making. Rather than following in the footsteps of the numerous other very successful large public pension plans in our province which have all been designed to benefit their plan members and their plan members alone, this government has made public statements about the ORPP being a large new pool of capital that could be utilized to fund large-scale transit investment.

According to the 2014 budget, in the section entitled “Unlocking Value from Government Assets,” the government presents the following:

“By unlocking value from its assets and encouraging more Ontarians to save through a proposed new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, new pools of capital would be available for Ontario-based projects such as building roads, bridges and new transit. Our strong alternative financing and procurement model, run by Infrastructure Ontario, will allow for the efficient deployment of this capital in job-creating projects.”

Speaker, there is nothing wrong with pension plans investing in infrastructure projects, but only when that decision has been made by an independent body with only the interests of pensioners, not voters, in mind. This is a concern I highlighted the last time I had the opportunity to rise in the Legislature to discuss this bill, and it is one that returned when the government voted against this amendment in committee.

Pension plans operate with the sole objective of delivering a secure retirement for their members, and this sort of language from the government leads us to believe that they are less concerned with this principle than the dozen other holes they have dug for themselves. We want guarantees that this pension pool will be further away than arm’s length. This money is for retirement security

and retirement future, not for bankrolling more dysfunctional public-private partnership boondoggles or for sinking into more scandals.

This government is notorious for throwing good money after bad. This pension plan must be stronger than gold-plated; it needs to be steel-walled against political sticky fingers. Guarantee that for the people of Ontario, please.

I'm going to read the third amendment that the NDP proposed at clause-by-clause consideration:

"I move that subsection 3(2) of the bill be amended by striking out paragraph 3."

Let me tell you a little bit about paragraph 3. Paragraph 3 of subsection 3(2) currently reads as follows:

"Information necessary to determine whether an employer provides a pension plan or other retirement savings plan to its employees employed in Ontario and, if so, which employees participate in the plan, the nature and level of the benefits provided by the plan and the contribution rates under the plan."

The reason for this proposed amendment is because there would be no need to go through the extensive hassle of collecting this sort of information if the plan was universal like the CPP. By adding this step to the process, the government is forced to incur other costs and undergo processes that simply don't need to happen.

And this says nothing of all the other benefits of universality that are lost by exempting certain groups from the ORPP.

Once again, this is another example of a concern that I raised the last time I spoke in the House, but unfortunately it fell on deaf ears. It is a concern we also heard from countless stakeholders during public hearings, but the government opted not to listen to them either. For this, I will return to my comments from February.

1540

Mr. Speaker, I will refer back to the bill on the basic requirements of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan schedule to elaborate on this issue.

In order for an employee to be considered eligible, they must meet the following criteria and any other criteria specified by the not-yet-tabled next piece of legislation:

"(1) The individual is 18 years of age or older and under 70 years of age.

"(2) The individual is employed in Ontario and their employment is eligible employment.

"(3) The individual's annual salary and wages are above the minimum threshold....

"(4) The individual is not in receipt of a retirement benefit from the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

"(5) The individual does not participate in a comparable workplace pension plan as determined under the legislation referred to in subsection 1(2) of the act."

So let's look again at that fifth point. To be eligible to contribute and benefit from this progressive and inclusive plan, the individual must not participate in "a comparable workplace pension plan." What is "comparable"? What will disqualify someone from benefiting from this plan?

Again, we look back at number 5. "Comparable" is going to be determined under the next piece of legislation. The bad news: We still don't know what "comparable" means. The good news: neither does the government—yet. I know that the government is deep in consultation with some of the leading minds in the field of pensions and retirement security. I know because we have been too. There are so many important things to consider. It is at least reassuring that the government hasn't made any rash decisions.

While it is still up for discussion, let us explore a few more ideas to consider when we are discussing comparability. What is "comparable"? As New Democrats, we were worried that comparability might be determined on the contribution side rather than the benefit side. While we never got an answer to our repeated inquiries in question period on this matter, we were glad to read in the Liberal discussion paper that defined contribution plans, or DC plans, will not be considered comparable and therefore disqualify their members from benefiting from this Ontario pension plan.

With the amount of pressure this government will no doubt be under from the banking and insurance lobbies, I know how tempting it might be to reverse that position and do a U-turn. Defined contribution plans, though, are not comparable. They must not be considered as such, no matter how tightly they put the screws to you.

Another issue with comparability: It says in the schedule that a worker may not "participate in a comparable workplace pension plan." So my question is this: Are we only talking about plans or are we talking about people? Here's my point: Some might argue that, as a teacher, my plan would be considered comparable or better, and therefore disqualify me from participating. Some might argue that OMERS, a strong pension plan, also would be considered comparable. That seems to make sense from a plan-to-plan comparison standpoint. However, from a person-to-person point of view, imagine a part-time worker in an OMERS plan. That person would receive a significantly reduced amount compared to a full-time worker contributing to the plan. That reduced amount is not a sufficient amount to live on. Do they deserve to be disqualified from participating in a plan that would allow them to live more securely?

Also, what about workers who have only paid into comparable plans for a short period of time? Their pension benefit could be a pittance compared to someone else in the plan. I would urge the government to approach this question carefully.

This is what it looks like from here: It looks like the government is focusing on disqualifying people to reassure the business community that fewer and fewer people will be eligible to participate. I suggested in this Legislature that the focus be on ways to include more and more people. If the goal is to provide more security, then let's do it. If the goal is to grow the pot of money for the future benefit of working Ontarians, then let more people participate.

What if a potentially exempted worker wants to pay in, wants to invest in Ontario? Will there be any way to

voluntarily opt in? What if a worker who is close to retirement wants to pay more now to benefit more later? Will there be a way to top up and pay in? What if a worker is part-time or recently enrolled in their pension plan and won't receive sufficient benefit? What added security can you offer them?

The old adage "The more, the merrier" may not entirely be appropriate, but it worked for our health care system, which was once universal and proud and strong. Since, it has been reduced, undermined and chipped away at by the federal and provincial governments. It is the average individual in Ontario who is paying the price.

There is an opportunity here. The government should not be so quick to dismiss the arguments for universality. The logistics and administrative nightmare of tracking even one individual through their career of varied employment—eligible, ineligible, comparable, not comparable, all of that—should be factored in. However, as I have said, the call from those interested in pensions is that this plan must mirror the CPP to the greatest extent possible. If it doesn't, rather than providing retirement security for more people it might undermine the goal of expanding the CPP for all Canadians. This can't happen.

We concede that there are tricky details to be figured out, but starting at a place that is the most inclusive seems to be a good place to start. Everyone deserves the opportunity to live with dignity and security in their retirement. Perhaps the government might consider that everyone deserves the opportunity to participate and benefit in a plan that will ensure that security.

On this topic, I would also like to refer to a question I submitted on the order paper on November 18. The question was this: "Will the Associate Minister of Finance responsible for the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan clarify whether PRPPs will be considered comparable and will employees of employers enrolled in PRPPs be exempted from the automatic enrollment provisions of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan?"

It took a while, but we eventually received a response from the government sometime in March. I will read their response here now:

"On December 8, 2014, Ontario introduced the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2014, that would, if passed, create a framework for the establishment of the ORPP and commit the government to establishing the plan by January 1, 2017.

"On December 17, 2014, the government released a discussion paper that set out its preferred approach on key design features of the ORPP, including the definition of a comparable plan.

"As stated in the discussion paper, the preferred approach is to define comparable plans as defined benefit (DB) and target benefit (TB) multi-employer pension plans (MEPPs) as these plans closely align with the key features of the ORPP and the CPP.

"The government recognizes that voluntary savings mechanisms like PRPPs will also play an important role in strengthening the retirement income system. As the minister has previously stated, our current view is that

these vehicles are complementary and will not be considered comparable.

"The government is currently reviewing submissions from the consultation process. Final decisions on this and other key design features will be outlined in the future." It is signed by our Associate Minister of Finance.

Just to revisit: As it says in the letter "currently," we want a commitment. We know the government brought this bill forward to appease their friends on Bay Street. We know it is being given a head start of at least a few years and that insurance companies will have just enough time to entice employers with no-contribution piggy banks for their employees, whose personal contributions will grow a huge profitable product that will benefit industry, rather than dignity in retirement.

As you can see, the government, as usual, has been rather careful with their language. In more ways than I can count, they leave their position open-ended and downright malleable. This is not to say that we expect the government to have all of the details of the ORPP set and ready right at this moment. But this is not a logistical question. It is a question of intentions. It is a question of priorities. It is a question of whether the government is more concerned with making the plan as strong as possible or making their friends on Bay Street as happy as possible.

If this government wanted to give pension security a real chance, they would have waited to introduce these profit plans. I guess it comes down to priorities. It is disappointing that, time and time again, we see this government cater to their rich and powerful partners rather than real, hard-working, often struggling neighbours, families and constituents. It should be individuals who benefit financially, not only the financial industry.

We will continue to hold the government to account so that these sorts of concessions are not made and so that Ontarians receive the most progressive plan possible going forward.

1550

I'd be happy to also share amendment number 4 from the clause-by-clause consideration: "I move that section 1 of the schedule to the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

"Defined benefit plan

"(8) The Ontario Retirement Pension Plan shall be a defined benefit plan."

This was another symbolic amendment. It is another chance to highlight to the government the reason why we favour defined benefit pension plans over defined contribution plans. There are many ways to invest money in this province. If you have money to invest you have options, and more soon with the PRPP legislation.

There are many defined contribution or DC plans that are offered by different employers. DC plans come in many shapes and sizes. Many people are familiar with group RRSPs, as one example. Defined contribution plans are based on the contribution—how much someone puts in. The benefit that is paid out at retirement is not guaranteed. It is subject to the will of the market. If the market plunges, so too does the benefit.

Defined benefit plans deliver a benefit to retirees based on a defined and guaranteed benefit. The benefit is secure and predictable. People can participate in their economic community freely when they trust what they have coming in. Defined contribution plans are insufficient in terms of providing for pensioners, and they are more costly to the system in the long term.

The shift from defined benefit to defined contribution is turning out to have been a short-sighted, corporate-driven, costly shift. DC plans are easier for employers, on the paperwork side of things, and shift the risk to employers. DC plans are tidier numbers to report to shareholders. As reports like HOOPP's Shifting Public Sector DB Plans to DC state, "If the motivation for a conversion to DC is to reduce costs, then it should be noted that shifting to DC actually increases the cost of delivering a comparable ... benefit."

Come to light, we are seeing the benefit—pardon the pun—in prioritizing DB plans over DC plans. Our hope is that the government will take counsel from those who are writing the reports and who actually, and actuarially, know about designing pensions.

The fifth amendment that we put forward at clause-by-clause was: "I move that subsection 2(1) of the schedule to the bill be struck out and the following substituted:

“Eligibility under the plan....

“(1) An eligible employee is an individual who is employed in Ontario in pensionable employment within the meaning of the Canada Pension Plan.” This is another amendment that was intended to focus the government on the need for the ORPP to mirror the Canada Pension Plan. The CPP is tried, tested and true, and while we accept that the current federal government is unwilling to move forward with CPP enhancements, we want to ensure that the ORPP will be easily integrated into the CPP when a new government comes along.

In 1965, the Canada Pension Plan was first established on a single, simple principle: being a senior should not be the greatest indicator that an individual is living in poverty. It is from that initial belief that one of our country's largest, most inclusive social programs was born. It is because of that same principle that we are all here today discussing pensions. At the end of the day, all Ontarians, all Canadians and all people deserve the right to retire with dignity.

Too often we are told that pension plans are a luxury or they are a thing of the past, but retirement security is not a luxury; it is a necessity. The Canada Pension Plan continues to prove that collective retirement security can be delivered in an efficient, effective and reliable manner.

Life doesn't stop at retirement. The CPP was created on the principle that it is beneficial to all of us when our friends and our neighbours aren't struggling and can continue to contribute to the economy after they retire. Unfortunately, though, as the world has changed around us, the benefit provided by the CPP has become insufficient. The maximum yearly benefit is \$12,500, and the average senior ends up receiving less than \$7,000 per year from the Canada Pension Plan.

It remains our steadfast belief, as the government maintains as well, that the ideal way to solve the retirement security crisis is through an enhancement of the CPP. It is the simplest solution for the greatest number of people, and it would permit a number of efficiencies and securities that can only be provided on a national scale. It is too bad that our Prime Minister does not see it the same way. With CPP expansion currently off the federal table, we are left to explore other options, but I remind the government not to forget our shared belief that increasing the CPP is the ideal option. As they continue to roll out the design of the ORPP, I hope they will ensure that the plan can be easily integrated in the event of future CPP expansion.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad that I am the critic for pensions. I am glad that I get to use my voice to call on this government to ensure that as many Ontarians as possible have security in their retirement. I have given a one-hour lead already on Bill 56. As I said, here I am again speaking for an hour on a bill that is the first of three to set forth a new social program, a new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. I am speaking on a bill that has been through committee; however, I am speaking on a bill that, unfortunately, remains almost entirely unchanged and not strengthened by that process.

It is terribly disappointing that this government gave little thought to the amendments put forward on behalf of stakeholders. It was actually a very patronizing process. Stakeholders were invited to participate, but ultimately, it would seem that their voices, their expertise, their investment, their insight was irrelevant and, I would say, largely unwelcome and certainly unheeded.

As we saw in the budget, as a result of extensive input and consultation, the government is committing to further input and consultation. What a sham of a process. What a sham, and what a shame.

Speaker, since nothing from committee hearings, minus a single PC amendment, made it into this new and almost entirely unchanged bill, I'd like to take this opportunity to further share some of what was shared in committee. During clause-by-clause, as I just mentioned, the NDP put forward amendments calling for more to be able to participate in this pension. We put forward amendments that would prioritize universal benefit rather than exemptions. At this early stage of decisions, where details have yet to be determined, why the priority to rule people out rather than allow them in?

Sadly, as we saw in the budget, this government is concocting new ways to minimize the benefit of this proposed plan, privatizing and capitalizing on the service delivery. Speaker, if I may read to you from the recent budget: "One of the government's initial implementation priorities is to identify potential providers that could help deliver a simple, reliable and cost-effective pension service-delivery system for the ORPP. At this time, the government is assessing a range of service-delivery options for pension administration. As part of this process, the province is proceeding with a procurement to identify potential third-party service-delivery providers

for the ORPP. Costs of administering the ORPP would be borne by the plan.”

The more money in the pool, the greater the benefit to pensioners and all the more retirement security across our communities: That should be the fundamental goal of creating this pension plan. I’m progressive. I’m a huge fan of pensions, and I will stand here in enthusiastic support of a progressive pension that will strengthen retirement security across the province. But you are wildly misguided if you think we will support any unscrupulous privatization of a public pension.

It is interesting that, after the consultation process, the introduction and discussion of this bill at first and second readings, the consultation paper, public hearings and clause-by-clause consideration, the first reference we hear about a P3 delivery model of the ORPP is a single paragraph on page 149 of the budget. But I guess that’s what we have learned to expect from this government.

Speaker, we’ve gone through eHealth, we’ve gone through Ornge and we know from the Auditor General’s own report in December that this government has wasted over \$8 billion on public-private partnerships. Now the government wants to open the door to another with the ORPP. Occasionally, the Liberal government actually agrees with us on things, but a P3 delivery model is not going to be one of them.

1600

I would, however, like to read to you from Hansard, Mr. Speaker, a few highlights from clause-by-clause of the bill in committee and instances where we did agree.

As I had said, “We hope that this plan, and any pension, is going to be worthwhile in terms of benefit.” And the member from Etobicoke North said, “I would salute the NDP voice of reason.” I appreciated that, incidentally.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Ha, ha. I will continue: “While we recognize that there are many strong DC plans out there, and we did hear from a number of them during the hearings—to say ... that any or all should be excluded, that doesn’t support the idea of a strong and reliable benefit into retirement. The contribution side of things isn’t what we should be comparing, especially if we’re going to look at plans to be exempt. We should be looking at the benefit.

“Ultimately, we do hope that the ORPP is going to be designed to provide the most secure and most predictable benefit to the most people.”

My colleague from across the way said, “Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to Ms. French for presenting 31.1, an NDP motion.

“While we appreciate perhaps the intent of attempting to universalize this particular program, I do have to say once again, with respect, that, given the consultations, the papers that have been floated, the thousands of written submissions, the numbers that are being crunched currently at the Ministry of Finance and so on, the definition of ‘comparable plan’ and therefore the resultant inclusion or exclusion of individuals is still pending. While we

appreciate what you’re attempting to do in this particular motion, we will not be supporting it.”

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I know. I was somewhat relieved to hear that while they wouldn’t be supporting it, which is disappointing, their decision is still pending regarding who will be included, and we do hope that it will be more.

I would like to remind the government, as we’ve heard in many of the hearings and with the submissions across the province, that there are going to be some more than frustrating, almost insurmountable, challenges when it comes to the logistics, whether we’re tracking employees in the plan, out of the plan or from one comparable plan to the next.

Mr. Speaker, after the hearings, during clause-by-clause consideration, I was disappointed that the government continued to consider exceptions. I was, as I said, glad to hear decisions are still pending on who will be included; we hope that it will be more.

It would be more efficient to manage this plan if anyone who is to qualify for the CPP would be able to be a part of this plan. That would also be true with portability and flexibility. If everyone is in the plan—depending on their precarious work situations, their changing work situations, and young workers—it just makes far more sense.

I appreciate, of course, having the opportunity to talk about the variety of challenges facing Ontarians, challenges that could be helped significantly through a stronger retirement security system, challenges such as increasing hydro rates, which are an increasing drain on families’ budgets. We recognize that, right now, businesses and individuals are immensely challenged by the hydro situation. It is another chance to remind the government that perhaps we should take a closer look at fixing those problems rather than sweeping them under the rug of privatization. “Hide and sell” really isn’t the NDP way. We would encourage you to hold on, and let’s give Ontarians a fair shot at being able to afford their hydro bills. No one is surprised that this Liberal government has kept Ontarians in the dark, but it is a surprise that they would like Ontarians to live in the dark, which is pretty likely once no one can afford to keep their lights on. But I digress.

During clause-by-clause I heard from my PC colleague that we’re all “in the same boat.” I’ll speak about what I know in terms of my riding. I wouldn’t say that we’re all in the same boat. Some are in a boat and they are clearly ready for retirement. Others can only hope for that kind of stability because they are currently challenged by precarious work, if they can find it.

Also, for many it isn’t smooth sailing. We heard a lot, actually, during the committee hearings about this 87% supposedly saving enough for retirement. We heard so many anti-pension groups and the PCs citing this stat from a McKinsey study.

It was an interesting number, because if I recall correctly—and don’t quote me on this—it was 87% who

are on track to at least maintain their current standard of living. I think that begs the question: For some of those who are currently on track to maintain their current standard of living, is that standard of living enough to sustain them in their retirement? Does that include households that are currently struggling? Does that include those who are in barely affordable accommodation?

It's an interesting number, and quite frankly, I think that all of us are manipulating it. But I think that when we look around our communities, if we're talking about equity and households and their readiness, equity and homeownership—they're wonderful things. Many of my constituents would love to be able to afford to have a home right now, but right now they're looking for affordable housing. They're looking for affordable child care. They're looking to be able to afford transit to maybe get to a job that they might be able to secure.

We also heard during clause-by-clause from the PCs, "Let's show people how to save." I would argue that many of those individuals who are struggling to get by and are somehow managing to make ends meet, but aren't able to save for retirement—I would bet that they could probably teach us a thing or two about how to stretch a dollar and manage.

I think that if we can remember that as the government is designing this ORPP, it really needs to benefit the most people in the most progressive and predictable way—again, back to including more, not kicking them out of the program. There are going to be challenges—we know that—with any new change, but we do want the most people to benefit in the long term in Ontario. If we can work towards that, I think that that should be the goal.

While we are talking about retirement security, I would also like to talk about pension security for few brief moments. As I said before, retirement security isn't just about promising a benefit; it is about ensuring that benefit is delivered. It should also be noted that the entire purpose of the ORPP is to supplement retirement savings, not replace them entirely. That means that there must be a strong pension system in place already, one with regulations that protect pensioners first and foremost.

It is important to note that the ORPP will not solve all of the problems that ail the pension system in Ontario. As we work to address the retirement security crisis in this province and acknowledge the need for proactive solutions, we must also address the existing gaps in our system if we want to make the most significant possible change.

It's important to add new tools for delivering security in retirement, but that doesn't mean that we can ignore the problems that are right in front of us. We need to work within the existing system as well to ensure that it is operating effectively and reliably.

Today, two thirds of workers in Ontario do not have a workplace pension. Those that do can't always rely that their pension will be there when they retire. According to December's Auditor General report, 92% of all defined benefit pension plans in Ontario were underfunded at the start of this year. Over the past eight years, the total

amount of underfunding of these plans grew from \$22 billion to \$75 billion. This is not an insignificant problem.

The fact is, we have a retirement security crisis in Ontario. Part of the reason for that crisis is that Ontarians don't feel secure that their pension will be there when they retire. Every day, my office hears from constituents that are concerned about the security of their pensions. Their retirement plan is based on the belief that their pension, something they have contributed to their entire working lives, will be there when they retire. But as that date approaches, that assumption appears less and less certain.

This is a sentiment, I'm sure, that all of you have heard in your constituencies across the province. Stories from the not-too-distant past, such as Nortel or Algoma Steel, and stories that are still playing out in front of us, such as US Steel in Hamilton: They continue to remind us of the need for reform.

The ORPP will provide a necessary supplement to the existing pension system, but that does not excuse the government from its obligations to effectively regulate workplace pensions.

1610

No plan is foolproof, Mr. Speaker, and there are always unforeseen bumps in the road. There need to be fail-safes built into the system to ensure that if the parachute doesn't open, there is still something in place to cushion the fall. In the Ontario pension system, this comes in the form of the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund, or PBGF. The PBGF was established in 1980 to ensure that when a company goes under and a pension plan is wound up, pensioners aren't left bearing the full brunt of the impact. Under the current system, the PBGF will cover up to \$1,000 per month in lost benefits for a worker. Unfortunately, as we've seen in the Nortel and Algoma Steel examples, sometimes \$1,000 per month is not a sufficient safety net.

For workers, this means instability, it means insecurity and it just doesn't cut it. Often the \$1,000 benefit guarantee is enough, but for a worker whose monthly benefit has been reduced, for example, by \$2,000, the inadequacy of the guarantee can mean the difference between security and having to choose between paying their mortgage or their child's tuition.

Twice, my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has put forward a private member's bill calling on the government to increase the benefit under the PBGF to \$2,500 per month, and twice, the bill has stalled. For a government that is trying to show support for retirement security, this seems like a pretty simple way to show it. As I stated earlier, retirement security isn't just about promising a benefit; it is also about ensuring that that benefit is delivered.

I should also note that my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and I aren't the only ones calling for this change. Harry Arthurs, the expert your government enlisted to review the state of the pension system in Ontario, first called for an enhancement of the Pension

Benefits Guarantee Fund in his 2008 report. As Mr. Arthurs noted in 2008, increasing the protected benefit to \$2,500 per month would simply reflect the effect of inflation on the original \$1,000 benefit. Seven years later, that number needs to be reviewed again.

While the government continues to develop the new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, I ask that it also review the recommendations made by the Auditor General in her December report and the recommendations made by Harry Arthurs in his report in 2008. It may not be the exciting story that you're looking for, but it is an important part of the bigger picture that you can't continue to ignore.

Mr. Speaker, as I said in December and said in February, I have appreciated having the opportunity to speak to this bill, but I look forward to the next one, which hopefully will have some substantive details. We hope those details are progressive, we hope they serve to benefit the greatest number of Ontarians, and we hope it is the interests of those Ontarians, and their interests alone, that are served by the final version of the design.

As you know, New Democrats have always been strong supporters of public defined benefit pension plans, and strong supporters of a strong public consultation process. This is a great example of when public consultations have spoken strongly in support of public defined benefit pensions. But it appears that the government was not listening during that process and believed that the conclusions they had already come to were infallible. From a lot of the stunts we have seen this government pull, it appears that they might think they are infallible in general, but Ontarians are not so easily fooled. Disregard of public interest will catch up to you.

We are asking for the government to try to redeem itself, to put its best foot forward on this bill and design a strong, progressive public plan. All Ontarians deserve the right to retire with security, so let's make sure that we give them the right plan to do so. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Oshawa. I'm looking forward to her follow-up in the follow-up hour leads on the legislation to come up.

At the outset, she said, "Retirement security is not a goal ...; it is a necessity." I think we share that. I think that's a reflection of why this government has moved forward on the ORPP. I have to say that I am astonished at the opposition party not supporting this legislation, but I'm even more astonished that the federal government did not do the right thing and enhance the CPP.

Mr. Steve Clark: Oh, John. Come on.

Mr. John Fraser: No, that's why I'm getting a bit annoyed.

I appreciated the member from Oshawa's comments. I take a little bit of offence at her saying we did this because we're trying to curry favour with our friends on Bay Street. I would argue that maybe that's what the federal government did and that in fact what we are here

to try to do, and I think what most members in this House want to do, is support retirement security for all Ontarians.

I also disagree with her \$8-billion figure on public-private partnerships, but that's for another debate.

As she said, this is tricky, and no plan is foolproof. We are following with another piece of legislation. I appreciate very much her role in this Legislature, which is to highlight those concerns as she did. I don't agree with some of the editorial comments that were there, but those are the concerns that we all have.

As this legislation goes forward, I'm confident that the minister and all members of this House will make sure that the ORPP is one that works, one that will be portable and one that will be compatible with the CPP. It takes a lot of work. I understand that it's your job to highlight those things. Again, I don't agree with your characterization of us but I appreciate it very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to provide a couple of minutes of comment on the speech by the member for Oshawa. I know that as a new member it must be quite a daunting task to have an hour-long speech, but you did a great 59 minutes. I want to thank you for that.

I do, through you, Speaker, want to express an apology to the member. I did mishear. I thought she did move an amendment. I know that I sort of caught the table off guard. I appreciate the fact that I made a mistake, and I apologize if I threw you off on your speech.

I enjoyed listening to the member's speech. Obviously I don't agree with most of what she said. We're going to be opposing this bill, as we did at second reading.

But I do agree with one thing that she did say about this government. I think she used the words "a perfect bill." As most of us know in the House, this bill came back to the House with, I think, only one amendment. It was a Conservative amendment. It just appears that this government, when it comes to some of their pieces of legislation, doesn't use the system the way I think it should be used.

I think that when we have a bill that goes into committee, especially a bill that has so many different views, we should take the opportunity to listen to some of those views to be able to incorporate them in legislation. I think it just sends the wrong message from this government that they're not open and transparent, that they don't want to hear those opposing views. It almost runs counter to their throne speech, where they pledged partnership over partisanship.

Clearly the proof is in the bill: the fact that it hasn't had any substantial amendments, the fact that other parties did have opposing views, the fact that there were suggestions on how to change the bill for—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Mr. Steve Clark: You're welcome, Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Paul Miller: I dealt with this issue—and I commend the member from Oshawa; this is a tough issue—years ago with Harry Arthurs. I have brought forth twice the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund increase, which was shot down by the present government and the opposition party.

The reason I did that was that in 1980, when this was brought in, when a person retired their pension could be anywhere from \$700 to \$1,500, so it was reasonable. But with most people who are retiring out of major manufacturing companies in a unionized atmosphere, their pensions are anywhere up to \$3,000 or better now. A thousand dollars falls quite short of what they would need when a company leaves Canada, absconds, goes back to the States, attacks their pension plan and attacks their benefits. That's what happens. So they end up with 30% of what they had, which was deferred wages, which they had negotiated over the years in their contracts to have some kind of protection when they retired. It's almost fraudulent, what's been going on with these companies not living up to their pension commitments.

1620

Also, what's missing in this ORPP plan—there are a lot of things missing which in my original plan would have been a lot different. What does a person who's in their fifties or early sixties do when they retire? Because this will do absolutely nothing for them. It's absolutely useless to them. Now, if they were able to buy credits, if they were able to take their 1% RSPs which are doing nothing and buy credits back into the pension plan, to take them back to age 30, 35 or 25—wherever they would get a benefit—they would end up with \$600 or \$700 or \$800 a month, which would be tangible and feasible. It's something they could put their hands on so they may hang on to their house or be able to pay their hydro bill and all the other bills. None of that was dealt with in here.

I sat down with Harry Arthurs. He came and talked to me because of my experience in pensions from years ago, when I went to Ottawa and lobbied on pensions. He came, and we had long discussions—two and three hours—and Harry and I kind of picked each other's brains. He had a lot of my suggestions in the bill that he put forward for this government, and a lot of those things did not show up. That's unfortunate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Hon. Bill Mauro: First of all, thank you to the member for her comments. Speaker, I can remember very clearly back to 2008, when the greatest recession since the Great Depression started to take hold in Ontario and, obviously, right around the globe. I remember very clearly, as well, the remarks that were being made at that time from the federal level, public comments that were characterizing what was going on in 2008 as a good buying opportunity. People's pension plans, life savings and investments were going down the drain overnight, their retirement income security was being wiped out, and the federal government was publicly talking about

there being good buying opportunities for people out there.

Now, they did eventually come around and take a different approach in terms of supporting the auto industry, like we had already begun to do. The point, Speaker, is that it was way back then—fully six and seven years ago—when as a government we first began asking the federal government to take what seemed like a practical and pragmatic approach to enhance the CPP. This didn't just start six months ago or a year and a half ago with us, in the last election as part of our platform. We began advocating on this with the federal government and asked them to use the vehicle that already existed, to enhance the CPP. Over four, six, seven years the federal government has consistently decided that they do not want to do that. That's their choice, but let's be clear: We've been doing that for six or seven years. This didn't just start now. It makes sense that that should be the vehicle. They've decided they won't do it, hence the legislation here before us today.

I would say to my friends in the official opposition that when you characterize this as a tax and that's why you won't do it, I guess to you then the CPP is a tax as well. If this is a tax, the CPP is a tax.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Oshawa for final comments.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you to the members from Ottawa South, Leeds–Grenville, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

To your comment, Minister, on taking us back to the, as you said, practical and pragmatic approach and trying to get CPP expansion: We hear you. It's a shame.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his tireless work on retirement security in Ontario; and on behalf of workers in Hamilton, as that work continues, we know. We're going to continue as a party to work for a fair increase to the PBGF, so thanks for the work that you started. I'm just going to continue that.

The member from Ottawa South: I'm sorry that you were offended by my characterization of the government, sir. That wasn't necessarily my characterization of you, although we'll see. But when we talk about currying favour with friends on Bay Street, I would hope that I'm going to be proven wrong; absolutely.

I actually just came from Bill 57 hearings, the PRPP, and listening in committee. Recognizing that, if we really wanted to prioritize retirement security, then, as we've said so many times before, why not lead with Bill 56? Why not lead with the ORPP, rather than allowing the PRPPs to get that head start and undermine the good that the ORPP could accomplish?

To the member from Leeds–Grenville: I don't mind that you made a mistake. I come out of education. That's how we learn. Certainly, you didn't throw me off, but you did highlight that my classroom-management skills might be getting a tad rusty, so thank you for that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to rise to talk about this pension plan that this government has devised. Actually, they haven't devised a plan yet. They have nothing planned. They just decided to take some more of Ontarians' hard-earned money.

It was interesting when I listened earlier to the Associate Minister of Finance and how on her travels through Ontario she listened to people at her hearings. She was in Perth-Wellington a few months ago. In fact, I'd like to read you a letter that I haven't had answered yet by the associate minister. This letter was sent to her on March 3, so it's almost two months. It says:

"This letter concerns your visit to Stratford on February 13, 2015, as part of your ministry's 'discussion' on the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP).

"As MPP for Perth-Wellington, I have sought to raise awareness of your government's intention to impose a massive new payroll tax on employers and employees in the form of the ORPP. Your plan would, as you know, require workers to pay up to \$1,643 per year and would force employers to match those contributions. I contacted many of my constituents about your plan on January 5, 2015; I notified them of your government's public discussion period and provided information on how they could participate.

"The response toward your plan that we received was universally negative. In fact, I have yet to hear a single small businessperson in favour of your proposal; I agree with my constituents that your government has left too many questions unanswered. To name just a few: the impact of this new tax on the self-employed; its cost to administer; the definition of a 'comparable workplace pension'; and its effect on unemployment. No doubt you would have heard such questions if your discussion had included the 'broad range of perspectives' you say you are interested in hearing. In this case, based on the feedback I have heard, your event did not have that.

"Unfortunately I was unable to attend your event in Stratford because your government did not invite me. If you are truly interested in hearing a 'broad range of perspectives,' why would you deliberately exclude democratically elected MPPs, effectively shutting us out of an opportunity—paid for with taxpayers' money—to listen to our constituents? Partisanship should never dictate such decisions, especially when you are using non-partisan officials and resources from the Ministry of Finance. I hope you will also explain why you used a defeated Liberal candidate to distribute the enclosed non-partisan Ministry of Finance invitation to the event in Stratford"—who, I might add, has also been hired by this government.

"My constituents deserve to know that you are taking seriously all of their views—whether their background is business, labour, unionized, non-unionized, self-employed or unemployed—no matter what their political stripe. Sadly, your government appears not to have done so. Despite your stated intention to hear a 'broad range of perspectives,' your actions so far would suggest you are listening only to those who agree with you. That is not the way to consult. That is not the way to govern.

"If you are sincerely interested in a non-partisan discussion on the ORPP—one that encompasses all viewpoints—I would ask you to come back to Perth-Wellington. My office would be more than willing to work with yours to help arrange a constructive and informative event. I am confident this would ensure you hear from the people I represent.

"We look forward to your response," which we haven't had for two months.

1630

What I did is I compiled a number of letters that we've received on the ORPP. Certainly there is not enough time here to read all these letters, but as a representative of my riding, I listen to my constituents and I think they should be heard because they weren't invited to this meeting she had in Perth-Wellington at the Festival Inn.

Here's one from Tim Culliton, who's the owner and president of Culliton mechanical, electrical and HVAC systems in Stratford. He addresses it to the Associate Minister of Finance, and he writes:

"Dear Minister,

"I am writing to express serious concerns with respect to the design elements of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP), which were released in a government consultation document on December 17, 2014. What concerns us most is the suggestion in the document that the definition of a 'comparable' workplace pension plan would be restricted to 'only defined benefit pension plans and target benefit multi-employer pension plan.'

"As an organization that provides a DC workplace pension to our employees, we are dismayed and strongly recommend including DC plans in the definition of 'comparable.'

"A DC plan such as the one we have is a great workplace retirement savings vehicle for our employees. They tell us they understand and appreciate their plan, and it has helped us attract and retain talent. Our DC plan allows our employees to benefit from:

"—employee contributions of 3% of pay, with no cap on earnings;

"—employer contributions of 3% of pay;

"—very low administration and investment costs;

"—strong and steady growth of their retirement savings in prudent funds within the plan.

"Our DC plan was established in 1982. Our DC plan is professionally managed, held at a major Canadian life insurance company and meets all the requirements under the Ontario Pension Benefits Act.

"Given the financial contributions we already make in our employees' DC plan, participating in the ORPP would be an unnecessary and costly burden for both our company and our employees. Our employees value their current workplace plan and have expressed their concern at the notion of having to save in a new plan. Moreover, at a time of economic fragility, the ORPP would cut into wages and employee benefits in Ontario, and businesses' ability to sustain employment and invest in new growth. It would weaken Ontario's competitiveness, and may incent some businesses to focus on job creation and

investment outside our communities and province rather than here.

"I reiterate the importance of exempting organizations such as ours from mandatory participation in the ORPP. We offer our employees the opportunity to participate in a good workplace retirement savings plan that should be recognized under the ORPP legislation. This is fair for our employees and right for our province. Thank you for your consideration of the concerns expressed in this letter, as we look forward to resolving this issue."

It was signed by Tim Culliton, president and CEO of Culliton.

This is someone that the associate minister could have heard from had they sent the invitations out sooner. They only sent them out a day ahead of the meeting. This is ridiculous—just simply ridiculous. We got that information from the chamber of commerce manager and a friend of his who works for a bank in Stratford, that that's when they got the invitation to come to this meeting, so two people show up. Aside from other people who were in favour of the ORPP, two people show up—incredible.

I would also like to read a letter from Bill Nelson. He lives in Mount Forest. He writes, "As the owner of two small businesses that employ 12 people, I view the introduction of an Ontario retirement savings plan as both redundant and unnecessary. I cannot fathom reasoning for even considering such a plan. At a time when the manufacturing sector of Ontario is under siege I cannot imagine why we're considering legislation that will impose further overhead cost onto businesses and particularly manufacturers. It is bad enough that we have the amount of union-negotiated labour rates that make us uncompetitive and the imposition of tremendous amounts of legislative reporting; now we're imposing a back-handed tax that is viewed by many as a method for the current provincial government to obtain additional cash flow so as to internally fund the rampant spending, inefficiency and waste that we now, and have for several years, witnessed. If the government is 10 times as efficient in administering this retirement pension plan as they have been with our tax dollars over the last decade or so, the poor workers who have had their paycheque further reduced by pension deductions, believing that they will have additional pension income in the future, will be sadly and sorely disappointed."

"In my limited number of discussions with representatives of companies, both domestic and international alike, there is not an overall air of confidence about the economy in Ontario and in the legislative/administrative trend of our current government."

That's signed by Bill Nelson, broker of record for Coldwell Banker realty in Mount Forest.

Speaker, I know that there have been all kinds of cautions by our caucus on this type of legislation, expressing the concern that this is a job killer, and expressing concern that it's just another tax that this government is implementing on workers in Ontario to feed their appetite for more money all the time. Yet we see a government that is not willing to manage the money they have

coming in. Our debt keeps going up, and this government keeps asking for more and more money all the time. That's what we think this is; in fact, what I know it is.

I also have a letter from a constituent of mine. It's from a small bus company owner, John Chapman, of Newry Coach Lines. I might add that it's a small school bus line that he's fighting to save because of this government's RFP program that has put countless bus owners out of jobs because of its failed process.

He writes: "I am opposed to the creation of this new Ontario pension plan for a host of reasons. The most significant of my reasons for opposition to this plan is, with the rocky economic times that Ontario is in, why would the government encumber businesses with a 1.9% payroll tax. In actual fact that is all this amounts to. Also, with so many workers in Ontario working for minimum wage jobs, why would this government take 1.9% of their wages when the majority need the money to pay their ridiculous hydro bills?"

Right on the mark.

"I am also opposed because I do not recall Ontario becoming a 'granny' province where Big Brother knows best. The people of this great province have more than enough faculties to make decisions regarding their own retirement and how they plan to fund it. If the argument regarding this point is that the poor do not have the means to fund their retirement then I propose a different solution. Instead of just issuing social assistance cheques that get cashed at the Beer Store or the local convenience store, issue vouchers for food, heat and hydro and leave the people some of their social assistance funds for retirement instead of what they're buying at these stores."

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This is a statement made by a constituent who I happened to listen to, which is not being done by your side of the House.

"This would also ensure that the most vulnerable amongst us have the necessities of life for themselves and those they look after."

"Finally, with the track record of the Liberal government at managing anything that involves money, and I don't feel I need to list these, why would this government want to create another political boondoggle where more funds will be spent on building accommodations, paying staff, bonuses etc. etc. than actually gets invested in the retirement plan."

1640

"Leave the people of Ontario to plan for and implement their own retirement plan. Let the businesses of Ontario be competitive in the marketplace without any additional taxes. Lastly, quit trying to be in business when clearly no one at Queen's Park has any idea how to compete in the private sector."

These are pretty strong words, but that just emphasizes the frustration that businesses have with this government. How many businesses have left Ontario in the last number of years? Quite a few. And as I believe was mentioned previously, some of these pensions they've taken with them—because they've left Ontario because

we're not competitive anymore. And you people aren't listening; your government isn't listening.

Our hydro rates are uncompetitive. That's forcing these businesses out. Certainly, we have letters all the time in our riding office about ordinary people not being able to pay their hydro bills. Wouldn't it be nice if we were competitive with energy rates in this province so that people would have some more money to save? Isn't that a novel idea? That's what people want to do: They want to save their money. But every month, when they get their hydro bills, they keep going up and up and up. In fact, I believe there are more increases coming this year, as the energy minister has stated previously.

The government's solution to this is to add another cost to business, and also another cost to the people of Ontario. Why don't they look at what they're doing now and try to manage it better? That's what a business would do. If a business is having an issue with making money or staying afloat, they will look at what they're doing and try to introduce some things that may work better in their businesses. They just don't add costs, because it just won't work. This is something this government has an issue with.

I'm not going to read this whole letter—it's quite lengthy—but it's from a fellow in the riding. He runs a couple of restaurants, and he has much the same story. If he has to start paying for this bill, it's going to cut his profitability down. Also, the other part of it is that it's going to take money out of his employees' pockets, which certainly is not going to help them.

Again, if the minister had let us know about this meeting, or even if she didn't want me there, if she had notified the businesses in Perth-Wellington that she was coming—instead of the day before—she would have heard all this. She would have heard this side of the story. Unfortunately, she didn't do that.

It's quite depressing when these things happen around Ontario, because the government wants "openness" and "transparency"—those are a couple of words they've been throwing around here all the time—and yet when this happens, we certainly don't see it, and people in my riding don't see it.

I wrote this letter a couple of months ago. I have the invitation here that was supposed to have been sent out; it only got sent out to a couple of people. There is no answer from the associate minister as to this letter here in more than two months.

I would suggest that the associate minister doesn't have a plan. There's no plan here. But how can you devise an effective plan if you don't listen to all sides of the story? They don't want to do that. They don't want to do that, because their whole issue here, their whole game plan here, is to have more money come in. That's it. That's all it is. Really, I would think that anybody who's going to benefit from this pension plan years down the road is going to have to have a real worry about whether there is going to be any money there, because of this government's spending habits.

Certainly, there needs to be more consultation on this, and they have to start listening to those such as the

people that sent in the letters to me. They have to start listening to those people, because they haven't been doing it in the past and it doesn't look like they're going to do it in the future. They're putting in too many roadblocks for businesses in Ontario to succeed. If businesses succeed, their employees succeed. This is something that this government, for some reason, just can't understand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to comment on the member from Perth-Wellington. It does always amaze me in this place how differently we see the world sometimes, based on our positioning as party members—partisanship, if you will.

I will commend him, though, on commenting on what can be done right now to help people in the province of Ontario—because that is also part of the problem. That's the other side of the equation: Yes, people do not have a vehicle to save appropriately—obviously, from the research and the evidence, when one is put in place and there are incentives to actually save, then those savings do occur—but you also need a good job.

The onset of precarious part-time contract work in this province is now well-documented. It's actually mentioned in the budget document—I'll give the government credit for referencing it—because that is what was heard at the consultation. People came and they gave feedback to this government. They said, "Listen, we have a hard time making ends meet as it is, because of the precarious part-time contract work situation in the province of Ontario." That's obviously a concern, so I think the member from Perth-Wellington accurately identifies that.

The Auditor General also found that, with current pensioners—there's FSCO, which actually monitors, and is supposed to be—the province should be better protecting pension plan members. This is from the Auditor General, who we, of course, put great faith in. She says, "FSCO has limited powers to deal with administrators of severely underfunded pension plans..." In fact, she goes on to say, "FSCO's federal counterpart has legal authority to terminate a plan, appoint a plan administrator or act as an administrator, while FSCO can only prosecute an administrator ... after it orders the windup of a plan."

Interestingly enough, there's a piece of legislation which FSCO has been asking for for some time, and this government could put it in place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, it's a pleasure to comment on the member from Perth-Wellington. I must say I'm delighted that he mentioned a number of times that he's here to listen and represent his constituents. I commend him for that.

The question, though, I have is—he seems to only listen to some of his constituents: business owners. I listen to business owners. I tell you, I sometimes hear the same things that you said. Let's face it. I've been self-employed all my life in a small business. But I wish he

would have brought the views of the rest of his constituents, comments that count here. In business, they have a valid reason, and I appreciate it; I accept it, Speaker.

He talks about how we're not listening. Well, Speaker, I hate to say it: We're listening. People are listening. They listened on June 12. This was part of our platform. They gave us a direction that this was what they wanted to see.

Interjection: Who's not listening?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Who's not listening?

I would hope that the member, in his two minutes, when he gets to respond to the comments, would tell us what his other constituents are telling him.

Speaker, I had two post-budget breakfasts last Friday, one in the west end of the riding and one in the east end. At both breakfasts—and I didn't eat; otherwise I'll gain some weight—I did hear one businessman bring that concern forward, and at the other one I heard the same thing from a couple of business folks over there. These were chamber-sponsored, but I can tell you, people pulled me aside afterwards and told me, "I'm disappointed by what I'm hearing from those folks. We'd like some security as we retire." These were not retired people. They might not even qualify because of their age whenever we roll out.

I hope we're listening to all the people of Ontario and our constituents.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm proud to say a few words of comment after our member from Perth–Wellington gave a great debate representing his constituents on what he has heard. I find it quite shocking that this government refuses to respond to the member's letters and quite shocking that he is a representative of his electorate, the people who elected him. They didn't elect a Liberal there; they elected a Conservative. Naturally he's going to be canvassing those people in his riding and many questions have come forward from his constituents. He probably is looking for answers to give his constituents both for and against the pension plan, and this government has ignored him. I see that as a failure on the part of this associate minister to step forward and bring these answers to the people of his riding.

1650

You can only look no further to the amendments that were put forth by both the NDP and the PC Party, and one passed. I find that very hard to believe that only one amendment passed from the opposition coming forward. It's obvious this government isn't listening. They're coming forth with this plan of a payroll tax to the people of this province, which is going to cost jobs, and they're okay with that.

Probably small businesses will go out and mainly businesses outside of urban areas will go out, and that's seen by the representation on this side of the House: that they're not listening to rural Ontario. They, unfortunately, think they're just going to lead with this majority and go forward. I'm hoping, now that he has brought this

forward to this chamber, that the associate minister will get on her pen and answer and respond to this member.

From what the lead of the third party was mentioning, there are two more bills coming forward on this pension plan. Maybe if we got some answers we could have a better debate in this House instead of just letting these bills be rammed through and amendments being ignored.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: First of all, I'd like to make it perfectly clear that this is not a tax. This is called security income. Employers in this province have a moral responsibility to the people who helped them create their wealth. A lot of CEOs I've talked to tell me, "Yes, we have an obligation to our people, too. We've got to make sure they're okay."

Speaker, 74% of the people in this province don't have the money to retire. Do you think that's going to change? Do you think they're not going to need help? Yes, I would have loved to see the CPP enhanced; that would probably have stopped this project, but it didn't happen. We've been after them for years to enhance CPP. The money is there but they don't do it because they want to use it for other things. That's what the bottom line is. In EI, there's lots of money there that they're moving to other efforts. The money is there, so the feds aren't doing their job, number one.

Number two, the moral obligation to the people of this province—if I've got employees, I want to make sure they're going to have some decent nutrition in their old age, that they're not kicked out of their houses and that they're going to have medical care, because they helped create the wealth that I'm enjoying as an employer and I feel obligated to them.

The way the opposition party is talking is, "Just throw them by the wayside and give them a piece of bread and hope they survive." It's not going to happen. They can't even afford their hydro bills. They can't afford food. Where do they think they're going to save money if there's not an alternative way of doing it? I commend the government for moving ahead with this. However, I wouldn't have done it exactly this way. I had other things I would have liked to have seen, like buy-back credits so all people could participate, not just the people at 25 and 30 years old who will eventually benefit from this. The ones in their fifties and sixties won't at this point. They need to be able to buy credits and get back into a plan somehow so they'll have some security.

We're talking about people now who can hardly—they're making choices between paying their hydro bill or eating. If we left it up to the official opposition, we'd all be in that position. They're sticking up for big business; that's their job as the Conservative Party. I understand that, but it's not helping the little guys out there, and there are a lot more little guys than there are CEOs and corporations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Perth–Wellington for final comments.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the members from Kitchener–Waterloo, North-

umberland–Quinte West, Elgin–Middlesex–London and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for their comments.

The comment on listening to people—I could have written a 20-minute speech up and just talked about whatever. That's why I brought these letters. These are real people from my riding, these are real letters and these are their concerns.

When the minister was in the riding—this is why I brought it up. When the associate minister was in the riding, nobody was invited to the meeting. Now, who is she listening to? Nobody. That's how badly this thing was planned. Nobody was there.

To the member from Stoney—Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, I apologize: The only security this government is interested in is their own financial security. That's it. That's what they're after. They're after more money to spend on their projects because, quite frankly, they're under how many credit watches right now? Three, I think. They've got to try and get their act together. So what do they do? Instead of making it easier for people to live in this province—i.e., lower hydro rates and things like that—and easier for businesses to stay in this province—i.e., lower energy costs—what do they do? They do this to suck more money in, because they have a spending problem. That's their issue here. They have a spending problem, and for some reason, they don't want to try to get this under control.

I don't know who said it, but I would invite people to come out to rural ridings and just see—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I am from a rural riding.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes, well come on out to Perth–Wellington, come on out to Huron county and see how this government is not listening to the people of rural Ontario when it concerns the Green Energy Act and the mess that's being created out there. Telling me this government listens to people in rural Ontario—no. It doesn't work; they keep putting regulations on us in rural Ontario that hurt us, and that's what happens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is a pleasure to weigh in on this debate for second reading. I want to commend the member from Oshawa for presenting sort of the committee's perspective. I think that's really sometimes where the real work happens. It is disappointing to hear that some of the amendments that we put forward were not received well, but I'll give the PC caucus credit for getting, "The Minister of Finance shall prepare a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan...." I think that that's just good practice, strong practice. That should have been in there in the very beginning.

I'm feeling a little optimistic today because we're not talking about beer all the time. There has been a lot of talk about beer in this House. Who knew that there was a beer crisis in the province of Ontario? Coming soon to you, six-packs at Walmart: People will be very happy, I imagine.

But it's a pleasure to speak in favour of this legislation and in support of it, because we do have a retirement

savings crisis in our province. This has been a long-standing issue. I share the concerns of the party across the aisle that the federal government, certainly under Mr. Harper, has not been receptive in any way, shape or form to broadening the conversation around expanding the CPP. There is already a built-in administrative model there that actually is operating very well, but it needs to be modernized; it needs to be updated. In the face of that lack of leadership, I would say, from the federal level of government, I think that it is incumbent upon us to do something here in the province of Ontario.

I'm actually proud that this bill builds on some of the ideas that we had brought forward in previous Legislatures, but there are some concerns as this piece of legislation moves through. I know that there are several design models of it and three different pieces of legislation that will come forward. But anyway, we're pleased to support this bill in principle, and we look forward to seeing how it could be strengthened, although we did try at committee and that was not received very well, which I think is unfortunate. Everybody who was participating in that debate was trying to make this legislation stronger and improve it through the legislative process. That did not happen at committee, for the most part.

That speaks, really, to the new culture, I think, here at Queen's Park. That receptive feeling and that working in a more collaborative model, if you will, was very much present, I feel, in the minority government setting, and it's just not here anymore. In fact, we were able to actually move a lot of great things forward during those budget processes. We certainly tried for auto insurance; we tried really hard. Unfortunately, that side of the House chose not to honour those commitments. But I guess if you get some snow tires now, you're good to go, maybe literally and figuratively.

Specifically, though, as I mentioned, the ORPP legislation largely mirrors the Ontario retirement plan that we brought forward in 2010. As we all know, two thirds of Ontarians do not have a workplace pension. Certainly, as the finance and the Treasury Board critic, you certainly give me lots of opportunities to criticize, but I can't help but be reminded of this on a daily basis by countless emails and phone calls that I receive from constituents. I think some of those concerns have already been fairly articulated.

1700

People in the province of Ontario are obviously having a hard time finding work. They're having a hard time finding affordable housing. Transit costs have gone up. Education—post-secondary and college—has gone up. Some of those doors which should be open so that we can actually follow through on this vision of a shared prosperity actually might be realized.

Since I've been here—two and a half, almost three years coming up in September—the intensity of the concerns that I hear from constituents on the affordability of life and the ability to actually save, as I mentioned in my two minutes, is very much connected to the nature of work in the province of Ontario.

It's worth noting that in the 2015 budget, the government came forward and basically showed in a table that they over-predicted that they would create 67,000 more jobs in the province of Ontario. That's very much connected, I think, to the cost of energy, to some taxation burdens that people face and that the government has not recognized the cost of living, quite honestly.

But that 67,000 jobs that they predicted they would create in the province of Ontario—I mean, it kind of just proves that they're just as bad at predicting job creation as the former leader of the PC caucus. But that's very much connected to the revenue that is supposed to be coming into this place, and it's very unfortunate. But you can't blame people for not saving for a retirement plan when they can't find a job. The two obviously go hand in hand.

I can't help but look at the ORPP Act from this lens: It is around closing the growing inequality gap in the province of Ontario, which has costs attached to it. Those are health care costs. Those are justice costs. I would love to see and I would love to be able to support a piece of legislation that actually is going to close that gap.

As we know, there are too many Ontarians with insufficient workplace pensions, struggling to make ends meet once they retire. As I mentioned, the Auditor General had identified in her annual report, which I continually bring up, that the issue around pensions is a growing issue in the province of Ontario. She made a point of putting it through in her December 9 report that was made public: "The underfunding of defined-benefit pension plans in Ontario has become significantly worse over the past decade, and the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) should more effectively monitor these plans."

It's worth noting that "as of December 31, 2013, 92% of Ontario's defined-benefit pension plans were underfunded; in other words, they would not have enough funds to pay full pensions to their members if they were wound up immediately. This is a huge risk to the millions of members of those plans and their families."

Certainly there are ways that the government can actually strengthen FSCO, because FSCO has limited powers to deal with administrators of severely underfunded pension plans or those who do not administer plans in compliance with the Pension Benefits Act.

The significant finding is that "FSCO's federal counterpart has legal authority to terminate a plan." The Ontario version does not.

It's also uncertain "whether FSCO's Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund, designed to protect members and beneficiaries of single-employer defined-benefit pension plans in the event of employer insolvency, is itself sustainable." This came up at committee. This is something that is a long-standing issue. In fact, it's a growing issue. It's not a surprise issue, like the sudden surprise around infrastructure in the province of Ontario. The Auditor General has raised the flag on these pension plans, and those are key issues of value for money and service delivery highlighted by the Auditor General.

But it is up to us in this House—and we have the capacity to make legislation stronger—to ensure that we have a progressive, defined-benefit public pension plan that ensures our seniors can retire and live with dignity. The only way to do this is through a publicly funded, defined-benefit pension plan, and it's imperative to ensure that this is the norm. We have the opportunity to build something that will serve and protect all workers at all stages of their careers, be it young people entering the workforce, mid-career professionals or those near retirement. But I have to tell you that the key piece to this is governance.

Earlier today, I had the pleasure of having a finance briefing by the very committed people from finance. I think almost 32 of them came in. We went through all the schedules of the bill that we had questions about. And of course we had questions about the ORPP. I think the member from Oshawa really highlighted where our concerns were coming from. You'll notice on page 149 of the 2015 budget: "At this time, the government is assessing a range of service delivery options for pension administration. As part of this process, the province is proceeding with a procurement to identify potential third-party service delivery providers for the ORPP. Costs of administering the ORPP would be borne by the plan."

This is the first time, really, that we heard of this third party and this procurement process to get an administration in. But we do know that it will be called the administration corporation. These were questions that we had for the financial staff, all of whom, in their own right, I think care deeply about getting this right. It is worth noting that this administration corporation would not be subject to the Corporations Information Act. And—this is really interesting—there's no explicit mention of minimizing investment risk in its mandate. So in order for this to be successful, there has to be some understanding around risk management.

It's also worth noting, under schedule 10, that an act of an officer is valid despite any irregularity of his appointment or defect in his qualifications. That's the same as CPPIB for directors but not officers. So the board of directors, under schedule 18, can set the recommended remuneration framework for directors. Directors are going to be able to set their own remuneration on this administration board. I think that should cause some concern. It's right here that people who are sitting on a board get to set their own pay. Yes, especially because it's money that can actually be going back into the pension plan. But it is worth noting that the money collected and received is not public money, and if the money is invested, the increase in value is not public money.

We were just trying to navigate through what seems to me a very haphazard sort of effort to create this new corporation. I think that, going forward, there are a lot of questions out there about this. I mentioned in my original comments on the legislation that when I was knocking on doors during the election, there were people who said, "I need a pension. I don't have a pension, I don't have a job, but I need a pension." They really do feel that very soon

they're all of a sudden going to get a pension. So that's a concern.

Obviously, this budget didn't disclose a lot of details on the ORPP design, and the government says it's still considering feedback from its recent consultations. We've heard about this consultation process, though, and obviously there's some concern that not all voices are truly being respected throughout the process.

As I mentioned, the bill is the first of three pieces of legislation that the government plans to introduce. We've already seen two versions of this. Obviously, the concerns that we've had along the way have to do with the government's model, around the integrity of the plan, to make sure that at the end of the day the people who were originally intended to benefit from this plan actually are.

If you look at some of the examples in other provinces—for instance, this came out just in February, but it was from BC. The headline reads, “Public Sector Salaries: B.C. Investment Management Corp. Dominates Top 10 List Again. Senior investors received pay increases of more than 20% each.

“Seven of the 10 highest-paid public servants in B.C., including one who made \$1.5 million, work for just one agency: the B.C. Investment Management Corp., which invests money on behalf of public sector pension plans.”

1710

The concern is that whoever this third party is, whoever this new administration corporation is—and we did ask a specific question on this. We wanted to make sure that—well, it was an early question. It's an early question: Will the salaries and compensation for these investment managers be tied to performance? Because that's the model in BC, and you can see where the money is going from the fund. It's going to the top.

I think that this is actually a recurring theme in the province of Ontario. We have not been able to get this government to look at those upper echelon CEO public sector salaries, which really is incredible because if someone is on ODSP in this province and they make so little money—it's under \$629 a month—but they were allowed to work and make up to \$200, this government somehow can figure out if that person has made \$215 and that additional \$15 gets clawed back. But they can't figure out how to ensure that a university president, for instance at the University of Western Ontario, can't get two years' salary to the tune of \$900,000.

It's a source of frustration, obviously, because when you follow the money in this province—first of all, it's not straightforward to follow the money in this place. I think it's designed that way. When you follow the money, you can see that the people at the top are doing okay. The banks are doing okay. These are concerns for us, and we've red-flagged them.

We also would love for the government to look at ways to actually strengthen the economy and, as I already mentioned, protect pension members.

I have to go back to the alternative financing and procurement approach by Infrastructure Ontario. In the Auditor General's report, she referenced that—because

this speaks to where the money is going and who has priority status in the province of Ontario. While the goals and the principles of the ORPP we fully support, we are nervous and we have very valid concerns about the mechanisms that this government will employ to ensure that those pensions are actually there for the people who they're designed to serve.

The AG, of course, was very critical of the financing—the financial structure, if you will—around infrastructure development. She says: The AFP “approach used by Infrastructure Ontario assumed that the public sector would not have been able to successfully deliver 74 infrastructure projects on time and on budget. Specifically, Infrastructure Ontario's AFP approach assumes that the risks of cost overruns and delays are about five times higher when the public sector manages infrastructure projects.” However, “the AFP approach assumed that it would be reasonable for taxpayers to incur an estimated \$8 billion more (including \$6.5 billion in higher financing costs) to have this work done by the private sector on time and on budget.”

You can see why we are nervous, that in the budget this government is looking to contract out in some variation of that, some design of contracting out, to a corporation to manage the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. We want to make sure that every dollar that goes into that plan gets to the people who need it most. That's the relevance around this piece.

While I'm here, I might as well mention that Infrastructure Ontario's Loan Program made a higher-risk loan of \$216 million to a subsidiary of the MaRS Discovery District, a not-for-profit organization, but the ultimate costs and benefits of the loan are unclear.

So the due diligence, the fiscal responsibility of designing and managing a plan like the ORPP—you can't blame us for having doubts about this government's ability to navigate and to design a plan with the people at the front of the process.

That said, we support it in principle, but we obviously would love to see the current pension plan structures, the underfunding of the current pension plans—that needs to be addressed. FSCO needs to be strengthened in legislation to protect current pensioners. There is actually a piece of legislation on the books that has already received royal assent. It just needs to be called. There's no need to do extensive debate on it.

We are very concerned about the administration corporation of the ORPP and the integrity of that process. We want to make sure that there is some fiscal due diligence. Actually, that was the one amendment that was secured at committee for this piece of legislation. It's incredibly important.

I look forward to hearing the responses from my colleagues in the House today. I think we all share the belief that we have to get this right. Even though the PC caucus thinks it's wrong, we still need to get it right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As always, it's a great opportunity to have a chance to stand in my place here in

the House this afternoon and speak in response to the comments made by the member from Kitchener-Waterloo with respect to Bill 56. I did have a chance to hear almost all of the remarks made this afternoon by that member, and also to hear the remarks brought forward as part of this debate by her colleague from Oshawa, who spoke just a little bit earlier. I actually want to commend both of those members who have spoken here this afternoon, members of the NDP caucus, with whom sometimes we agree on items and sometimes we don't agree. But today they both spoke very thoughtfully, obviously having put some time and effort into their ideas with respect to Bill 56.

I think we all recognize—even members of the PC caucus would recognize—that there is more that does need to be done. There are some high-level disagreements, I guess I'll call them, about what the best vehicle is to proceed with in terms of making sure that we do, for the long term, provide more income security for those who will be retiring in years to come.

It's not just a social issue, of course, Speaker. The Associate Minister of Finance responsible for the ORPP has spoken very eloquently on this. This is, as much as anything else, an economic issue: to make sure that those who will be retiring in years to come have income security so that they can continue to make an economic contribution to the prosperity of the province, so that they can live in dignity but so that they can also continue to have what I'll call that collective purchasing or consumer power to help maintain the economy.

I want to congratulate both the member from Kitchener-Waterloo for her remarks and her colleague.

I look forward, as always, to working with all members on all sides of this House and, of course, working closely with my colleague the Associate Minister of Finance, who is doing an exceptional job carrying this bill forward with all of its complexities. I look forward to helping support this legislation, getting it passed and actually providing people with income security for the retirement that they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to provide a response to the speech from the member from Kitchener-Waterloo. I respect her as a legislator. She's a very good communicator. However, in regard to this bill we fundamentally disagree. I sat on at least one hearing with the member at the finance and economic affairs budget consultation. I see that the very capable Chair of that committee, the member for Scarborough-Agincourt, is here this afternoon with us.

Fundamentally, our job in this Westminster system is to scrutinize legislation. The Minister of Transportation was very correct that we do fundamentally disagree on how we're going to get there. Our party has caucused this bill, has studied this bill. The member for York-Simcoe, who did about a half-hour speech this afternoon, has worked tirelessly on our caucus's behalf on retirement issues. I've listened to some of my constituents. That's part of being a legislator: making a decision on a bill.

1720

We fundamentally disagree with this bill. We do not believe that we should be imposing this in Ontario at this time. It was one of our budget asks, that the government not move forward with this piece of legislation. But the reality is, as the opposition House leader, this bill will pass very soon. The government will pass this bill with the New Democrats' support, but it won't be the last time that this type of bill will hit the floor. We all know that there are many more pieces of legislation that the government will need to be able to implement this pension plan, and we will do our job as Her Majesty's loyal opposition in making sure the government hears the other side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure to be able to stand in the House this afternoon and bring the voices of Windsor-Tecumseh to this chamber. It's especially an honour to follow my esteemed colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo, who always brings great passion when she speaks in this House.

To the young pages that are in the House today: This bill is about you, because you may qualify for this pension if this bill is enacted and we follow through on it. The rest of us won't; we're not going to get a pension overnight.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: That's not true; I'm younger than I look.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Well, you may; I'm not sure. But the rest of us won't. I know I won't.

It's you that we're talking about. But we have to do more for pensioners, and we have to treat our pensioners with dignity and respect. We're not doing that now.

I'll give you one example of an email I received just this afternoon from a pensioner in Windsor who has a problem with his insurance. He was in an accident, I guess, and then he found out that if he was working, he has a wage replacement policy clause in his insurance coverage that he pays \$50 a year for that would help him replace wages lost after an accident, but he's retired. His insurance company knows he's retired, so why the heck are they charging him \$50 for a wage replacement policy that he cannot possibly ever receive? The government knows this. The government isn't doing anything to help pensioners in Ontario and retirees in Ontario who have to pay this clause—it's hidden in there—to get wage replacement when they don't qualify for wage replacement. Someone is getting ripped off. He says it's him; he says it's every pensioner and retiree in Ontario. We have to do more to stand up for people like this and to stand up for pensioners and retirees in Ontario. Unfortunately—I hate to say it—the government's not doing it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon in support of Bill 56.

I heard some of the debate this afternoon, and I think much of the conversation has been talking about the different philosophy of the opposition party in terms of

seeing this particular bill as another tax. I want to remind everybody in this chamber that much of this conversation is about how to improve the lives of Ontarians as they retire, because there's enough evidence, where I come from in the health care sector, that there's a relationship between a good pension and the health of a community. On March 31 of this year—it shows the fact that a community like Elliot Lake—37% of the community's income is derived from pensions, RRSPs, CPP, OAS and GIS.

It's clearly stated in the article by Adam Mayers that seniors with defined benefit plans are more confident as consumers and better off in terms of their personal affairs. So very, very clearly—and I know, having been a nurse, that when people have secure income, they're more likely to have better health outcomes. So there's a strong relationship between health and finance.

The other piece here is, for the opposition to continue to criticize this particular bill, saying that it's not properly done, this and that—they have to listen to the evidence, because at the end of the day, there's research after research. The last one that has been done by the Boston Consulting Group talks about the fact that there's a relationship between pension income and the health of a community. Unless the opposition party has done their own research, there is ample evidence out there that talks about this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for final comments.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Leeds–Grenville for his great comments, until he said “but,” and then the Minister of Transportation and the members from Windsor–Tecumseh and Scarborough–Agincourt.

I couldn't agree more than with the member from Scarborough–Agincourt. The social determinants of health are very much connected to income inequality and being able to earn a living. People want to work in this province, but they have to have the jobs in order to save.

If I could leave anyone—everyone, not just anyone—with a thought on this, it's that the governance piece for the ORPP is the key component, because if you get the governance model right, if you design this plan correctly, where the majority of the benefit and the funding actually gets to the recipients, not like the BC model, where, as I mentioned, the fund managers made off—because they had tied performance measures to their salaries. A good public plan is one that remains in the public domain, because it should be fully not-for-profit. The managers, obviously, should be able to make a fair wage, but the management of that fund needs to ensure that every dollar that comes in through investment gets reinvested for the future. Those are by nature the most successful plans in the country.

I hope, as we go forward, that the outstanding question will be: Will the ORPP corporation, this third-party entity, implement a pay-for-performance system that is tied directly to portfolio performance? Because, if so, then the money will go elsewhere.

What about bonuses? Because in 2009, the CPPIB lost 24 billion of taxpayer dollars, but the executives made off with \$7 million in bonuses. So let's protect the integrity of this plan going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad to have my chance to participate in the debate on Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. I didn't get the opportunity during second reading, because this government wanted to rush this bill through, even though it's years away from being implemented. I'll briefly go over a bunch of the opposition that has come out during the debate and reiterate what has come out through the committees and debate before going forward with a little bit more that I can add to the debate that I was unable to do earlier.

Basically, it's come out that there are a lot of questions from this bill still unanswered as it goes through third reading. Of course, the government, being the majority, will pass this bill—probably tomorrow.

The business plan, that this bill actually makes sense at the end of the day—where is that? Why hasn't it been shared with the opposition or with the public as a whole? Where's the cost-benefit analysis of how this bill will actually make sense down the road with regard to the costs that it will incur on society as whole? No true details of when this will be paid out—I've heard that 40 years from now we'll get our first payment, which will benefit the pages, as the member from Windsor West has mentioned. I'll be in my early eighties at that time and probably still working and be able to retire and collect on this, perhaps, or collect it and income tax will take it away from me.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Windsor–Tecumseh; sorry. Windsor West is—no, you have Windsor West, too, do you not?

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Okay. Over there.

The pension plan—the government still is satisfied with the fact that it's going to kill jobs coming out: 18,000 jobs for every \$2 billion collected. According to estimates, that's 54,000 jobs per year which will be lost due to this bill. That's okay for this government, because they're pretty confident in that losing jobs is not going to harm this economy, let alone small towns and villages throughout the province.

Even the CFIB and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce have said that they cannot afford this pension plan, that Ontario cannot afford this pension plan. I would assume this government would sit down and talk with the chamber of commerce and the CFIB as to what route should be taken to help improve the businesses in this province, improve them to create jobs, improve them to be prosperous, improve their chances of competing in a global marketplace.

1730

Again, the chamber of commerce has also thrown out there the fact that this government has no energy plan. They keep coming up with a long-term energy plan every

two or three years and, at the end of the day, our energy rates are still skyrocketing. On May 1, the peak times will go up 15% for the people of this province. I think that's quite a concern for the small businesses that are trying to make ends meet. This government now is going to add on the Ontario pension plan tax on top of these skyrocketing—

Interjection: Not a tax.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Sorry? It is a tax. You take something out of somebody's pocket, it is a tax.

Interjection: A payroll tax.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: The employees and employers are going to be paying 1.9% of their salaries, which decreases take-home pay. As I said earlier, you get a new graduate wanting to buy a house, who has debt from going to university, and now with skyrocketing hydro rates—and now we're going to be taking another 1.9% out of their pockets. People today aren't able to afford this, Minister—Speaker, sorry. Some day you might be a minister, Speaker, but right now you're just the Speaker.

Interjection: Just?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Just. Well, I'm not a Speaker either.

Anyway, this is not a well-thought-out plan. The fact that there are comparable plans out there that will be exempt, what exactly those plans are—I've talked to numerous businesses in my riding who feel that they already contribute to a pension plan with their employees. At the end of the day, when they impose this pension tax on top of the businesses, it's either they're going to have to rejig their pension and get rid of it or they're going to have to lay off people, which is probably more likely going to happen. At the end of the day, I don't see how that is beneficial to many places in Ontario.

I do want to touch upon, just quickly, the CPP and what I've been reading about it over the years. The opposition says, "Oh, the federal Conservatives aren't acting on it." Well, actually, the federal Conservatives have said that the economy is too fragile to implement this tax. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? If this government got off their duff and actually did something to the economy of this province, it would actually help the province of Ontario improve the economy, which would actually help the country as a whole, which would probably get us out of this hole.

Instead, Ontario is heading towards a \$300-billion debt. They're still at a \$12-billion deficit. Over the next two years their interest payments are going to hit \$13 billion. Then you look at the federal side of things—a balanced budget, tax breaks for everyone; anyone with a family is getting tax breaks—you're seeing that they're trying to create the economy where they can make changes to people's lives. So it's not like the other side of the House, where they don't care about what is going on today. They're worried about the future down the road but they can't get their fundamentals right in order to make a better economy down the road. What they're actually doing is hurting Canada as a whole and hurting the chances of the federal government actually making

the changes to the CPP when the economy strengthens. As long as Ontario is weak, Canada is not going to reach its full potential. This government has no plan to make Canada any stronger.

First of all, this pension that they're talking about, the Ontario pension plan, is not going to start for a few years anyway, before they start collecting the tax from the people. The payments aren't going to come out for 40 years. There's going to be 40 years that this is not going to help anyone, except hurt businesses.

This government, with their propaganda, keeps telling people that they're helping people retire today. That is a fallacy, and the fact is that it's going to be at least 40 years for help to come. If this government would take its abilities, its ideas, its thoughts and actually work to improve the economy, work to decrease the cost of living for people so that they could have money to put away for pensions on their own and help improve the economy of Canada by making Ontario strong again, then the government would have time to fix the CPP and make the necessary changes down the road, which would only probably take another year or two, but they're talking about implementing a tax now that's going to hurt businesses, cause job losses and that's not going to have any effect for 40 years.

At the end of the day, we can't be guaranteed that this money the government is collecting is actually going to be in that pot, because we know they have \$130 billion they want to spend on infrastructure and they're out of money. There's only one other way to get it and that is to tax the people, move the money around and put an IOU in that bank account at the end of the day, because this government we cannot trust to deal with their money.

Instead of waiting a few years, this government is going to create a whole new bureaucracy in order to manage this fund, which is another cost factor. Where is that money going to come from to create this bureaucracy and run it? Is it going to come from the 1.9% from the employers and the employees, or is that another tax or another cut somewhere else in another ministry in order to pay for the creation and operation of this bureaucracy? This is just becoming a huge possibility for a scandal, going forward.

What I think the government should be doing, instead of going down the road of an Ontario pension plan, is in fact looking at ways to improve people's lives with less cost of living. Lower the cost of living. We've seen this government, over the past 13 years, erode the people's ability to earn money, keep their money and invest in their own pension plans or invest in their businesses, as they grow, so they have that as their pension as they move on and sell off.

What have we had? We've had the health tax taking money away from the people of this province and introducing the HST, the biggest tax grab in the history of Canada. We've had an increase in fees. I'm glad the Minister of Transportation is here. The MTO has just skyrocketed in all their fees. You talk about the driver's licence fees, car renewal fees. The Minister of Natural

Resources was here earlier. They've got a new service fee they introduced last December on top of increasing licensing fees. The carbon tax—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd ask the Minister of Transportation to withdraw.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Withdrawn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Continue.

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Yeah, unbelievable. Mr. Speaker, that only speaks to—when you're speaking the truth on this side, they start putting personal jabs at us. That's the way they want to be about the personal jabs; let's stay on the policy.

Anyway, on top of the health tax, the largest tax grab in the history of this province—the HST—the increased fees from the Minister of Transportation on driver's licences, on car renewals, on the—what do you call that one?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: The emissions test?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: The emissions test, the cash register through the ministry.

The MNR, as I said earlier, has increased hunting fees; the new service fee plus HST that everybody has to pay for on top of their outdoors card; the carbon tax that they're introducing—they probably don't call that a tax either, the cap-and-trade. That's not a tax, in their opinion, but that's going to hurt business, cost jobs, and at the end of the day, our groceries are going to be higher; our gas is going to be higher. Everything is going to be higher at the end of the day—and less money for take-home pay, less money to invest in your own pensions.

We also talked about the beer tax—\$100 million on the beer tax; mandatory WSIB for sole proprietors, owners of construction firms. They probably wouldn't ever collect on WSIB—had their own coverage, which was cheaper, 24/7. But they implemented that tax on people in order to make those businesses weaker. We now have the pension plan. Last but not least—I could probably come forward with more taxes, but I want to talk about the energy rates that this government has saddled the people of this province with.

As I said earlier, a 15% increase on peak times. The energy is going through the roof. They're taking the sale of the asset of Hydro One and putting the money in infrastructure instead of on the debt of \$27 billion. With a lack of revenue at the provincial level of Hydro One, they're going to be unable to continue to pay down that debt, so what are they going to do? Increase rates in the province of Ontario, which is going to drive out more business, decrease more jobs, and this pension plan is only adding icing to the cake.

I do have a Formet Magna plant in my riding, and this is a great concern of mine. Just before the last election, Magna came out and said that if this government goes through with the Ontario pension plan, they will no longer invest in their factories in Ontario. They will no

longer invest in this province. I have a factory that employs over 700 people in my riding, in St. Thomas. It has been there for a number of years. I've got a sister plant, Presstran, right near it. Both are Formet companies, at the end of the day—Magna companies. What's to happen to them when they need to be retooled, when they need to grow, and the company no longer invests? We're looking at job loss in the future.

Again, my riding, under this government, has lost over 6,000 jobs since 2007—6,000 jobs in a population of 37,000 people. That's a heck of a lot of jobs. We've lost Ford, we've lost Sterling and we've lost Timken. Timken was in our city since the 1940s. But this government walks into our province, takes control of the economy, runs it into the ground and drives out businesses that have been decades, decades, decades in this province.

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As I said before, this pension plan going forward is nothing more than a tax. We can talk about social engineering if you'd like, but if this government would stand up instead of being an adversary to the federal government, sit and work with them, saying, "We will do our part. We will get the economy going. We'll get the economy stronger. We will ensure that Ontario is competitive in this marketplace. We will ensure that they have their fair share of jobs and growth. We won't be a cancer to Canada"—because of the way they are managing this province. Instead of that, they've said, "We don't get enough."

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Will the member from Hamilton West—Stoney Creek come to order, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: Hamilton East.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. I can correct my record. Thank you very much.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Mr. Speaker, thank you. If this government would stand up and work with the government—instead of having a tax that's going to go on for 40 years before any possible benefit, why not work at fixing the problem at hand today, the economy, and ensure that this government can turn around and work with the federal government a few years down the road and fix the CPP? It will take away a lot of the bureaucracy they want to create, it will take away a lot of the burden that they'll cause for a person with their taxes. It will help stop the flow of jobs from this province.

It's quite a concern of mine—Mr. Speaker, as we go forward—at the end of this debate that during the committee structure, one amendment was passed. I find that this government is so closed-minded they're not even open for possible changes. Now they've gone ahead with the pooled pension plan, which I think is a great idea. That's the avenue they should have probably gone to strengthen it and allow businesses to create their own pension plans going forward. Instead, they've come forward here with this retirement plan.

But one amendment passing through, I think, is kind of ridiculous; that any bill would go through this House

and one amendment passes. I think it's quite shocking that a government would think they're that perfect in drafting legislation. Obviously, they haven't listened to all the concerns of all those who testified or the opposition parties for the fact of only one amendment to get through the House, and that's quite unfortunate for the people of Ontario and Canada as whole.

As I said earlier, this pension plan is going to have a negative impact for the province of Ontario. I know the pages here—as the member from Windsor—Tecumseh mentioned earlier, this is really for them. However, I'd rather work to have a better Ontario today, so your parents can maintain their own jobs, so your parents can afford your education, so that this government can ensure there are jobs for you, whether you go into a skilled trade or go to university. I would prefer that for you, so that you can have the money to invest yourself and have your own pension to be strong going forward, being able to afford your own family, being able to have more than one child, being able to live wherever you want in this province, being able to stay in this province at the end of the day. Too many youth are heading out west; they're heading down south because this is not the land of opportunity anymore. This government is driving this province into the ground, and they need to stop. They need to stop.

I'm sure if you sit at home and talk to your parents about their energy rates—I hope you do, after sitting here for a few weeks. Sit down and talk to them about how the energy rates—if, in fact, the government would quit increasing energy rates every three or four months, what they could do with that money. I think that's a great discussion to have, instead of listening to them saying, "We're doing this for 40 years." I'd rather do for you today so that you have a future tomorrow, not listening to, "We'll do this for you 40 years down the road." I think that's a poor way to go.

Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I'm addressing the pages in front of me.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Just don't call them ministers.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Well, you know, I just might. There's probably a future minister here.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm making a comment about you calling the Speaker "Minister."

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I know. I get that. Anyway, there's probably a future minister in the House here today. I may call them "Minister" at the end of the day because they might just be here. I won't sell them short, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to wrap up because I'm sure there are a few questions and comments that I may have actually—if they had let me speak during second reading, we probably could have had a more lively discussion. I tried to say things that would actually wake up the government to respond to what I've said. I think from the heckles and being called a liar, obviously I have done my job at instilling debate in this chamber, something that is being missed at the end of the day.

Anyway, I thank the members of the third party for their heckles and catcalls during this debate, and I look

forward to your responses to my debate. I'm sure we're probably not on the same page with much of what I said, but what makes this place special is that, actually, I can have my voice heard and I can hear your voice and we can have a great debate.

Mr. Robert Bailey: And the Liberal members can't speak up.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Well, the Liberals aren't allowed to speak, obviously, because they aren't debating this third reading. They've been muzzled. Perhaps, going forward, we'll have open democracy again in this House.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I appreciate the openness and the candidness on both sides during debate. I would certainly appreciate, though, that when speaking we are in fact addressing the bills and that comments would in fact be addressed appropriately.

With that, it's time for questions and comments. I recognize the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker. You know, some days I need an aspirin, and this is one of them. When I listen to the official opposition and their philosophy and their thoughts about pension plans, it's absolutely remarkable. It's off the map. It's from a different planet. I can't believe it. There is a social responsibility to our retirees and the people who helped build our province.

The owners of these companies—some of them I've talked to—feel an obligation to the people who have helped to build their wealth. They feel that these people deserve some dignity, some nutrition, to be able to pay their bills and not be thrown out of their house at the end of their lives. That's why the government is creating this plan.

However, there is one point, it's true, that the minister even mentioned: It's not going to help the people in their fifties and sixties. The only way it would help them is if they were allowed—and I brought this forward four years ago; I talked to Harry Arthurs for hours at a time and we picked each other's brain because I had done some lobbying in Ottawa on pensions. We believed in that time that you should be able to buy credits. In other words, if I'm in my fifties and my RRSPs are paying 1% and it's not doing anything in the bank, then I can take my RRSPs or any savings I've had and transfer them into premium payments, so at 65, I would have something—\$500, \$600, \$700 in a defined pension plan. That would help a lot with keeping me in my house or being able to pay my taxes municipally or contribute to the economy.

The official opposition is saying, "Okay, 72% of the people don't have a pension plan. Oh, well. That's too bad. You should be able to learn how to save." Well, if you can't pay your bills, you can't pay your house—and a lot of people who are retired and elderly and are living on fixed incomes can barely stay in their houses now—how are they going to be able to pay into a pension plan? I'm not quite sure where they're coming from, but wherever they're coming from, I certainly wouldn't want

them taking care of my finances because I'd be beside the road with a loaf of bread if I was lucky.

This is the way it's going. You've got to go this way. If they had enhanced CPP, there wouldn't be this discussion going on right now, and they didn't do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to build on my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. We just saw the member opposite declare the law of the jungle. Everybody take care of yourself, right? Don't be your brother's or your sister's keeper; that's not why we're here. Don't love kindness and seek justice; that's not why we're here. What are we here for? To bow down to the federal government. Anybody can balance a budget when they're not doing anything, my friend. The reality is that every province in this country has asked the Prime Minister and his federal government to enable an extension of additional supports through the CPP, and he has consistently turned his back.

I want to suggest to the most vulnerable people: We're trying to avoid the next poverty tsunami. We've got 43% of people who retire in Ontario still owing money on a mortgage, and 72% of them don't have a pension. And you want to stick them with a \$1,299 maximum payment every month? Shame on you. Shame on you. You're disgraceful. Disgraceful. I can't believe it. I can't believe that that's anywhere near reflective of the values that your constituents hold. I know the people in your riding. They don't think that way. They don't feel that way. They don't reflect the values that you articulated in this House. I'm embarrassed to even have to get up and talk about the nonsense spouted on the other side of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the minister and I certainly hope he feels better after that rant.

Further questions and comments.

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Mr. Toby Barrett: Well handled, Speaker. I'm a little taken aback by some of the comments from the government side and the interjections that came forward during the well-thought-out presentation by our member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

He made it very clear: This proposal for a pension plan has to be funded somewhere; it will be funded by a payroll tax. It will subtract 1.9% from an employee's payroll, and on top of that, and this is going to be tough for St. Thomas, it will subtract 1.9% equally from the business that employs that employee. That's a fact. That's the truth. It's a payroll tax.

It's just like the so-called health tax under the previous Premier, which turned out to be the largest income tax in the history of the province of Ontario.

Mr. Paul Miller: What does a health tax have to do with security?

Mr. Toby Barrett: It was a tax. A tax is a tax.

To hear interjections that the member is telling lies—I'm glad he repeated that for the record; I think that's important to put that in Hansard.

On top of that, like a lot of taxes that are over the top, this will be a job-killer. That will not bode well in Elgin county. That will not bode well for a community like St. Thomas, which has had a very, very tough time.

We have the ORPP, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, which will kill jobs. The province, right across the province, will lose 18,000 jobs for every \$2 billion that is collected in this payroll tax. That's the way it works.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's truly an honour to once again stand on behalf of the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane and my NDP colleagues and speak on the Ontario registered pension plan.

I think we can all agree on one thing: It would be better if we could just convince the federal government to increase the CPP. That would be the best plan. Unfortunately, tragically, our current federal government is too busy helping those who don't need help with schemes like income splitting, stuff like that. They've got their priorities smack dab aimed at the people who vote for them, but really they're kind of misguided regarding the benefits of all the people of this country.

Enter the provincial Liberals, and they're going to have a bump-up scheme for the CPP. On the face of it, we agree; we agree with the principle. What we're concerned about is whether this government, based on their track record, can actually pull this off without it becoming a major scandal, a major gaffe, a major downfall.

Today we got Bill 91, the budget. I'd like to read this: "An amendment to subsection 3(2) of the Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act, 2014 provides that the act does not apply to the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Administration Corp. and its subsidiaries." That is what we're worried about. Right away in the fine print—oh, we're going to put in a schedule to control public sector compensation, but right away, before we start off, we are going to exempt people from the schedule. Maybe if we have a plan like this, we need very high-priced people, but that should still be public.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now back to the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for his final comments.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad that I had the 20 minutes to speak and actually create some debate in this House. I appreciate the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. I'm sorry you have a headache this afternoon. I do have some ibuprofen in my office; I can fix that for you.

The member from Haldimand–Norfolk, I appreciate your comments. I'm glad to have some support in this House. I know I have 28 members of this House who do support our views on this pension plan.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, I appreciate your comments, and I appreciate how you are always balanced in talking about the policy at all times.

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I appreciate your comments, however off they may be. I do speak for the people of my riding. It's not a disgrace for me to

bring my points of view and my party's points of view to this House. That's what we're here for. If we all agreed on every policy and didn't speak our words—if we all did that, Minister, this House would be ineffective. I'm very thankful for the fact that I'm able to have that talk. I am not embarrassed. I am not disgraced by what I have said today.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I throw that back on you, Minister. How dare you raise the debt to \$300 billion? How dare you run deficits over and over? You are destroying the future for my children, these kids here and everyone else. All you know how to do is tax and take money from

people every day. Why don't you stand up for the people of Ontario and fix today for tomorrow instead of wasting your money and time for the people of Ontario and the future? You are destroying this province, sir, and you are a disgrace to this House.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Everybody breathe.

Since it is within five minutes of 6 o'clock, I want to thank all participants for a healthy, invigorating debate this afternoon. This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1756.

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Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
		Premier / Première ministre
		Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

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Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
Laurie Scott, Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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First Session, 41st Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

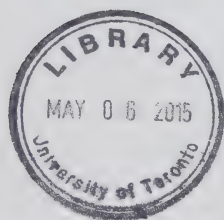
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Tuesday 28 April 2015

Mardi 28 avril 2015



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 April 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 avril 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2015 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 23, 2015, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson: To begin with, Mr. Speaker, I would just like you to know I'll be sharing my time with the member from Nipissing.

It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 91, the Budget Measures Act. I've been in this Legislature for a few of these budgets and budget bills, and it always amazes me how many areas of the province this single bill affects. Normally, these bills are stuffed with important changes to existing legislation, changes that stakeholders and people alike both voted for and wanted, but this budget bill is different.

This budget bill contains policy changes that not a single Ontarian voted for. There's the fire sale of our public assets without any concern for the province's hydro debt. There's the commitment to a carbon tax and a cut to health care dollars. The Liberal Party and the members opposite didn't campaign on any of those things—not a single one. There's a \$100-million tax on beer, cuts to apprenticeship tax credits and the film industry, and—most shocking—an increased deficit for the third year in a row.

This government continues to spend more than it takes in. That's no way to manage a government or achieve a balanced budget.

Applause.

Mr. Jim Wilson: That wasn't even a clap line.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's good to be the leader.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Oh, a couple of weeks to go.

Only this Liberal government could think that the way out of a hole is to keep digging.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance knows full well that the interest on the debt, tax dollars that the province literally throws down the drain, is over \$11 billion this year. It's growing at a rate of 5.4% every year; health care funding is only growing at 1.9%, by comparison. This year, education is even lower than that. Interest on

the debt is the third-largest expense on the government's books and it's growing the fastest.

Ontario can't afford more Liberal financial planning. That's why, as one of our five budget asks, we asked for a credible and detailed plan to balance the budget. Instead, the minister opposite put forward a budget that simply hopes the deficit will go away. He plans to cap spending but doesn't say how. He plans to increase revenue but, again, doesn't say how.

We all know this government hasn't met a tax they didn't like, leading us on this side of the House to believe that there are more taxes to come. Despite this fear, the Premier touted all weekend, on news shows, talk radio, in the media, that there are no new taxes in this budget. Yet there's a recommitment to a job-killing payroll tax, the Ontario registered pension plan—a payroll tax by this government's own admission—which will kill tens of thousands of jobs in its first year. That's why we asked for the government to abandon this damaging payroll tax but, again, they ignored us. They also ignored our calls to walk away from the carbon tax that will raise the price of everything: gas, electricity bills and even groceries. Again, the Liberals rejected our advice. Not only did the Liberals recommit to new taxes; they also didn't do anything to lower current ones.

This government did nothing to address our ask to reduce hydro prices in Ontario. People are being forced to choose between heat or groceries. Hydro bills have tripled since the Liberals took office, even with the Ontario Energy Board, and they're only going to go up with the majority sale of Hydro One. Not only could the government not guarantee hydro savings; they actually removed Auditor General and Ombudsman oversight of Hydro One in this bill. Now Ontarians will be forced to pay higher bills without any explanation as to why.

This is a direct reaction to the Auditor General's 2014 report, where she pointed out that the \$50-billion global adjustment tax brought in under the Liberals was simply a cover-up for their failed green energy policies. On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Ombudsman's record-setting investigation into Hydro One's billing practices isn't favoured by the government either.

The removal of this oversight is concerning. We in the PC caucus have raised concerns about Liberal choices regarding the existing \$27-billion hydro debt in this province. That debt is supposed to be paid off by the money Hydro One makes. Now that money—60% of it—will go to private companies and the debt will balloon. A larger debt means larger interest payments, which means higher bills. That's the reality for this government. It's only

going to get worse before it gets better. Hydro bills have already gone up by about \$1,100 a year on average since the Liberals took office, and that's before the sale of the majority of Hydro One. Quite simply, Ontarians can't afford to pay more on their hydro bills, and that's not what the people across the aisle campaigned on.

The privatization of Hydro One should be done to improve customer service, to create lower rates and to improve the efficiency of the organization, not to find money to pay off the deficit of the government's own making. On that note, the government has actually reached a deal to sell Hydro One Brampton. They reached this deal behind closed doors, in secret, with no competing bids and no public input. They sold the asset for a set price in a backroom. Well, that's not good enough.

How do we know, other than to take the Minister of Finance's word and the Premier's word—and their word is a little shaky at best. We're to take their word for it that this multi-billion-dollar deal is the best deal for Ontarians. I don't buy that, and they shouldn't be allowed to get away with that. They should have the Auditor General looking at that deal to see if we are getting the best bang for our buck. It's truly an ironic approach.

On page 209 of the budget, the Liberals unveil plans to create a centre for evidence-based decision-making, yet pages 73 to 86 talk about maximizing assets, including the sale of Hydro One Brampton, without any evidence to back up their decisions. The lack of evidence is truly astounding for a government that claims to be the most open and transparent ever. It's baloney.

There's also no evidence that hydro bills won't go up. The Premier can't guarantee it, and when asked for proof rates wouldn't skyrocket, Ed Clark simply said, "We don't think so." Mr. Speaker, Ontario can't afford to take this government at their word.

One area where the Liberals are expecting Ontarians to take their word is that all is well in home care. Every day, the Minister of Health stands in his place and says that everything is fine. But we know Ontario's home care system is a mess. It's very badly broken. The Premier and her Minister of Health actually acknowledged this when they brought in Dr. Gail Donner to put forward recommendations to fix home care. Dr. Donner's report stated quite clearly that the status quo is not good enough, that Ontarians can't afford the same old home care system. That's why we in the PC caucus, as our fifth budget ask, recommended tying funding for community care access centres directly to outcomes and streamlining the agencies and bureaucracies that a patient must deal with in order to get care. But sadly, that is nowhere to be found in this budget bill.

Overall, we put forward five sensible policy directions to be included in this budget: walk away from the job-killing pension tax and carbon tax; fix home care and the deficit; and work to lower hydro rates. The Liberals ignored all five, leaving us no choice but to oppose this bill and the Liberals' budget. Ontario cannot afford to continue on the path the Liberals have set us on.

Mr. Speaker, I've spent most of my time today addressing what is not in the bill, but it's important to know what

is in the bill as well. Normally, budget bills deal with the finances of the province. Normally, these bills make changes to a variety of acts needed to fulfill funding commitments.

0910

But instead this budget bill takes that a step further. This bill reforms the Auditor General Act to actually force the Auditor General to submit her audits in full to the government before releasing them to the public. Simply, the Liberal government is tired of being embarrassed by the auditor. They're tired of the auditor doing her job and exposing things like a wasteful \$2-billion smart meter program or the \$1.1 billion wasted on relocating gas plants. The auditor's oversight should not be muzzled. This bill will actually make the government less accountable, less open and less transparent.

But this government has shown a willing tendency to do what it wants, regardless of its mandate. When it comes to the sale of Hydro One, I thought that one day a desperate Liberal government may get itself into such a fiscal mess that it may start having a fire sale of our precious assets. That's why, when I put forward the Electricity Act, 1998, I put a clause in that act that mandates that all proceeds from any future sale or partial sale of Hydro One must go to paying down the \$27 billion of hydro debt. If all \$9 billion of the 60% sale went on to that \$27 billion, we'd start to see hydro rates moving in the other direction.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: They don't want that.

Mr. Jim Wilson: They don't care. They don't want that.

So, again, our PC government made it illegal to use the proceeds to pay for anything but paying down Hydro debt until that debt was paid off. Instead of honouring the law, the Liberals have simply decided to change it. Mr. Speaker, that's not how the world works. No family in Ontario can change the law just because they want to. Not a single Ontario family can just decide they aren't going to pay their bills anymore, but apparently the Liberals can.

To recap: We have a Liberal government that ignored our five asks, introduced new job-killing taxes, changed the law to fit their plans and didn't take action to address Ontario's health care system or deficit. I think the people of Ontario are going to thank the PCs for not voting for this budget. It doesn't address their needs. It doesn't address the most pressing problems of the day. It takes more money out of their pockets and raises the cost of living for everyone. We will not support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's hard to follow you. You spoke with conviction and had all the facts.

Mr. Jim Wilson: You just have to get as much sweat going as I have.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'll see what I can do.

Speaker, since the last budget all of the financial experts have warned the government that they need to drastically change direction. Since then we've seen a

downgrade from Moody's. We've seen a downgrade from Fitch. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has warned that the direction we're heading is about to put us in crisis. The government hasn't listened.

Mr. Steve Clark: I gave them a downgrade too.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: You gave them a downgrade?

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The member from Leeds–Grenville downgraded the government as well. In fact, I think we all did.

Sadly, the government hasn't listened. The debt is rising. The Auditor General warned that we are starting to crowd out the services and the programs that we've come to expect.

Today the government is crowing about their spending on infrastructure, but let's get into that a little deeper than our leader talked about. He spoke about the hydro sale and the concerns that we have—which we'll be talking about for many days and weeks—but I want to talk specifically about the \$130 billion that was announced in the budget.

It is exactly the same announcement that was made in last year's budget. In fact, if you take the two and put them side by side, as I did in the lock-up, it's a cut-and-paste. Word for word, it's the same \$130 billion, just recycled. But the bad part about all this is that not only is there no new money. They, last year, were going to put this \$130 billion in with only needing to sell \$3.1 billion worth of assets over four years. That's all they needed to do. It was going to be the GM shares and a few other little things; \$3.1 billion is all they needed to make that \$130 billion work. So why, when the GM shares have already been sold, do we now need to sell \$9 billion worth of Hydro One? And as our interim leader told us, they're not putting the money into Hydro One, which would reduce the hydro bills; they're stripping it away to put it into this program—ostensibly to put it into this program. That's why our hydro rates are going to go up.

So now all of a sudden we need \$9 billion in hydro sales, we need the LCBO headquarters sold, we need the OPG building to be sold—these are all listed in the budget. We now need more than a dozen billion dollars to make that work. But none of that is actually going in to that \$130 billion. It's all being touted as transit, but it's a shell game. That money was already in the budget last year. The \$130 billion was already accounted for without this \$9 billion in hydro being required. They're talking about previously announced money, and now they're talking about new money coming in. All that is only to balance their budget, or to attempt to balance the budget. It's all about taking money that was already in the transit fund out, putting this new money in, but using the money they've taken out to attempt to balance the deficit. That's all this is about. There's no hesitation to tell the public that. It was already in the budget.

Why are we in this problem? It's because this government continues to spend. Spending was up \$2.4 billion this year—\$2.4 billion. They continue to tell us they're controlling spending—they're not. It's tax and spend.

Beer tax, the second installment of the aviation fuel tax kicks in, the Ontario payroll tax is going to kick in, and the mother of all taxes, the cap-and-trade tax on everything, which will be discussed this fall, was in the budget. This is going to be the biggest tax grab that we will ever have seen. Put a tax on everything.

Our leader already talked about the energy sector. They have bungled that sector so badly that people are choosing between food and fuel. It's to heat or eat. That's the decision people are making. Many of us, from all three parties, were in Ottawa this year at the pre-budget consultations, where obviously there was no consultation being done. There was obviously nobody that listened to anything; the decisions had already been made. That's, I think, one of the things that irks me the most: The decisions were made. The budget document would have been prepared as far back as that time.

We listened to Jennifer—her name was Jennifer—a woman on ODSP. She sat in front of us and told our committee—all three parties were there—that she has to shut her power off at 6 o'clock every morning to turn it on again at noon, only to shut it off again at 3 every afternoon and turn it back on at 7. That's what she has to do to save enough money to eat. She says, quietly, "I put a few more sweaters on." That's what she does. That's how she survives. That's the Ontario that these guys have created. That's the problem. They've been living off their credit card and not off their debit card. That's the problem we have in Ontario.

Speaker, when you think about the repercussions now—not just to the families, because there are going to be repercussions to the families—there are families who are going to have to sit down and have that chat with their kids about, "No, we can't do that this year. It's the hydro bill." Can you imagine that? That Ontario—

I walk to work every morning. I walk by the monument of Sir Adam Beck every single morning. Every morning I look at that and I think, oh my heavens.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: What he would think.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: What he would think now, knowing what has been done and what is being planned by these people to do to our hydro sector.

First of all, when I got elected mayor in 2003, hydro was 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour. That was what we used as an economic development incentive in Ontario. As mayor, I remember touting our industrial park: cheap power; we had cheap land. We had all kinds of good things to attract business. I watched as it deteriorated very rapidly—it deteriorated. Today, our power is more than three times what it cost back then—that's only 10, 11 years—and it's destined to go up. In fact, it's scheduled to go up 42% by 2018.

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Now, that's before this debacle that will unfold. That's before they sell Hydro One in a fire sale, take the money away and don't leave us the cash flow to pay our mortgage. We still have the mortgage to pay. There are still going to be bills to pay in Hydro One. Why can't they realize that? Families do. People are writing to us;

I'm sure they're writing to them as well. I don't think the email that comes is exclusive to opposition members, which says, "I can't pay my hydro bill. What are you going to do about it?" It's sad to have to write this back.

There are going to be consequences. There are consequences to families; there are consequences to business.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Goodyear.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The member from Stormont, somewhere and somewhere—

Laughter.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's a great riding.

Mr. Steve Clark: Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I've been there several times now, talking, actually, about hydro rates with very concerned stakeholders of the member.

But he just mentioned Goodyear. That's the consequence we're going to have. Goodyear: not going to expand in Ontario. Why? We've become the highest-cost jurisdiction in North America. We have the highest energy rates in North America. We have the highest payroll taxes in Canada. We have a government that has a deficit. Businesses do not like to locate in a jurisdiction that runs a deficit because they know darn well what's going to happen to them. They're going to put their hand in that company's pocket and extract more cash to fuel their spending habit. That's what's going to happen.

Speaker, I'm going to refer several times to the new Focus on Finance book here.

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's got a hard copy now. It's got a hard copy. There's a chapter in the book that talks about taxes. Why? Here's a great example of what these guys are going to do. I'm going to lead that into why companies are not coming to Ontario.

Number one, here's a great example in the Victor mine up in Ontario's north. It's a diamond mine. It's the first and only diamond mine in Ontario. This company explored, they spent their own money, they dug into the ground and they found where diamonds were in Ontario. They started to go into building the mine site, but before they were done, they got a knock on the door one day from the province of Ontario telling them, "Oh, by the way, we're now introducing a diamond tax in Ontario. Every rock you pull out of the ground, we're going to tax. But don't worry, we're going to tax all diamond mines in Ontario." Of course, the Victor mine is the only one in Ontario.

Why? They saw an opportunity to dig in and extract some cash from yet another company that is now reluctant to be here, but they had already spent billions getting here. So off they go. Now their pocket's a little lighter, but they've put people to work.

I talked to the people in the Ring of Fire; I talked to all of the companies there. I've been there four times now and I can tell you why there's nothing going on there. First of all, these guys talk a mean game, but have not done a thing, not spent a penny. In fact, they haven't even applied for any of the federal money that's waiting there

for them—a billion dollars waiting for them; haven't even applied.

I can tell you what's wrong. We've asked. I think it was our member from Parry Sound–Muskoka who asked a question in the Legislature one day: "Are you contemplating a chromite tax?" That's the mineral that was found in the Far North. You know, the minister and the Premier would not say no.

You have to imagine these guys putting their business plan together. First of all, there's nothing happening up there; there's no way to get there; there's no way to get the ore out. They're worried. They are all individually worried that the second they start production, these guys are going to put a chromite tax in. Why not? They did it before. They did it to De Beers in the Victor mine. They have no shame. They will do that. That's the kind of thing that's holding them back.

Why is the government doing it? Because they have a spending addiction. They cannot stop their taxing and spending. It's an endless cycle, watching them tax more only so they can spend more.

The bond rating agencies are catching up to them, though. Moody's said last week that they continue to see risks in the province's budget. They went on to say, "Deficits have shown little progress in the past few years, and in fact have increased from 8.1% of revenues in 2012-13 to 9.2% in 2014-15." That's what's happening, Speaker. They're spending money we don't have.

Moody's concludes, "The return to balanced budgets by 2017-18 still faces considerable risks in our view."

They also suggest, "Provincial economic forecasts have tended to overestimate growth."

Here's what happened last year in the budget. The finance minister gave his budget forecast. I stood in this very place and said to him, "Your forecasts are wrong. You're budgeting too high. You will not make those numbers." The Bank of Canada said that you won't make the numbers. The Conference Board of Canada said that you won't make your numbers. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business said, "Hang on. Our businesses are slowing down. They're not fuelling that number you think you're going to hit." The Ontario Chamber of Commerce told us we had 2,700 fewer businesses in Ontario last year than the year before, and these guys pump up the revenue number.

What happened four months later? Only four months later, they had to stand here sheepishly and kind of shuffle their feet and say, "Aw, shucks. We were off by half a billion dollars"—half a billion dollars. They had to restate after only four months.

So that's exactly what Moody's said last week: "Provincial economic forecasts have tended to overestimate growth."

They say they're going to hit a number—a made-up number. They're not going to hit the number. We know that they fake the numbers. We've seen it time after time after time. They fluff the numbers.

Last year, in fact—I'm reading from an article—"Sousa"—they're referring to the finance minister—"said

the province has demonstrated it can control spending, noting it managed to trim its deficit by \$1.6 billion over the previous projections." Speaker, that would be pretty darn funny, actually, if it wasn't so sad.

He's saying, "We said the deficit would be \$12.5 billion. It was only \$10.9 billion. Aren't we great?" Well, you fluffed up the number to start with. We know you did. We have your own documents from the gas plants scandal that told us you purposely fluffed up your numbers—but then not even making the fluffed-up number.

One of the rating agencies said the only reason they met that \$10.9-billion number was "a \$335-million reduction in interest on debt (reflecting lower-than-anticipated interest rates)"—thank God rates went down—that "accounted for over half of the reduction from plan after taking into account the reserve." They had a billion-dollar reserve there. They didn't use that, obviously. It was in there to fluff it up.

So you've got money you didn't spend and interest that you didn't spend. Of course you made your number. Your fake number of \$10.9 billion was still higher than the fake number that they had in earlier.

Speaker, we're surrounded by all kinds of fake numbers.

Moody's is on to them. There's no question that Moody's is on to them. Moody's said they still have strong concerns. There are risk concerns that they have, and we're going to see in the next days and weeks if that plays out into a ratings change for us. That would be devastating for Ontario.

I can tell you again, when I served as mayor of the city of North Bay, we did the prudent, fiscal conservative things that were necessary to turn our economy around. In my seven years, we had five upward bumps of Moody's—five—till we matched the province of Ontario. We had one of the highest ratings of any municipality in Ontario, tied with Ottawa, tied with the province of Ontario. It was a great day when we hit that.

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After I left office and came here, it was a very sad day when Moody's downgraded the province of Ontario for their fiscal mismanagement and dragged along with them all of the other municipal and crown agencies that match the province. They couldn't have a rating higher than their guarantor. They all got dragged down. The city of North Bay's rating got bumped downwards through no fault of their own, just for achieving the title of being tied with the province of Ontario—one of the highest ratings brought down. It put borrowing costs up. It put borrowing costs up at hydro. All the hydro utilities, municipalities like Ottawa and North Bay and many of the universities—all got dragged down along with the laggards here at the province of Ontario, who brought our ratings down. That was a shameful day, and a very expensive day for taxpayers.

Speaker, I want to refer to a few sections in Focus on Finance because this is exactly what we said would happen in the province of Ontario.

Moody's debt-rating agency last year changed their outlook from "stable" to "negative." Why? They expressed their concerns over the government's ability to eliminate the deficit in three years. They said, "It can't be done."

Remember, Speaker: At the time, the debt was going from \$9.2 billion—got bigger, to \$10.5 billion. It skyrocketed to \$10.9 billion. We're going the wrong way, and Moody's acknowledged that, so they changed their outlook from stable to negative. They said, "Ontario's persistently large deficits, and its tendency to delay the most significant cost-cutting measures towards the latter years of its projected timeline for returning to a balanced budget, increase the risk that the province will be unable to achieve its goal."

What happened? The first paragraph in Moody's comment says absolutely clearly that they can't control their spending. What did they do? Spending is up \$2.4 billion this year. Moody's is right. They can't control their spending. They live off that credit card, knowing, Speaker, that you and everybody else here is going to have to dig into their pocket a little deeper and pluck out money to pay them. That's the addiction they have, knowing that it's fuelled with the ability to continue to tax you.

The Conference Board of Canada said that Ontario can't meet its pledge to balance the books by 2017 without spending cuts or tax hikes. Well, they're getting the tax hikes right, according to the Conference Board of Canada. They deny it, but we've seen them. We've seen the tax hikes: \$100 million on beer; the aviation fuel tax.

Down near the member from south—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. I'm going to learn that one.

When I was visiting the member's riding, we passed by Prescott to get there. Just over the border from Prescott is an American town called Ogdensburg. Ogdensburg is a sleepy little town. It has a beautiful museum that Frederic Remington—his former house. It's a sleepy, quiet little tourist town. They're building an airport. Why? Because they want people from Ottawa to drive to Ogdensburg, cross the border and fly cheap, just like they do in Detroit, Niagara, Buffalo and everywhere else.

What do we do? We are raising the aviation fuel tax. It's a tax. It's a \$100-million tax. This is what's happening. They tax and they spend—spend \$2.4 billion more than they did last year.

The Auditor General said it best, Speaker. She said that Ontario's debt continues to "grow faster than the province's economy," which could have "negative implications" for the province's finances. But her conclusion was the most striking. She concluded that the consequences of high debt will result in what she called "the crowding out" of other spending. What does that mean, Speaker, "the crowding out" of other spending? It means—

Mr. Jim Wilson: We see it in health care.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We are. Our leader is saying that we're seeing it in health care. I'm going to give those examples in a moment.

Our interest rate—if interest were a government ministry, it would be the third-largest ministry. After health, education—interest. Can you imagine that this is what we've turned to in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Jim Wilson: At low rates, too.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: And it is low rates. When those rates go back to normal—not if they go back to normal; when they go back to normal—can you imagine the devastation on our government budget and our pocketbook that that will have? Our rates are going up because of the increased spending. Our interest is going up 5.7% next year. That's the fastest-growing line item that we have in our budget.

The Auditor General said that we're going to start to crowd out the services. Here's what happened last year. It's very simple: We're paying interest with our health care dollars. We cut diabetes testing strips. We cut cataract surgeries. We cut physiotherapy for seniors. We're now using the money that went into those very important issues to pay our increased interest. That's the Ontario that these people have built. That's a shame. That is a shame.

In my hometown—I've said it many times standing here—we've lost 94 front-line health care professionals, including 54 RPNs. We've lost 34 part-time health care professionals, including nurses. We've had 43 people at Ontario Northland fired this year. We've had 54 people at Nipissing University fired this year, including 22 professors. This is what's happening, and not just in my community. I use my examples. Every single person here—and on that side, by the way—can give those same examples.

Mr. Robert Bailey: If they were free to speak.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: If they were free to speak; you're absolutely correct. That's what's happening.

The Auditor General has said that you're going to see a crowding-out. And boy, did it ever happen fast. She only said that in December.

She also said in December to look for a ratings downgrade. Shortly after, we heard from Fitch, and we heard from Moody's, when Moody's went from stable to negative. That's very serious. That has serious consequences. That reverberates through the financial community.

You have to wonder why we have companies—well, I guess we really don't have to wonder why we have companies like Kellogg's, Heinz, Caterpillar, Wrigley and, in your neck of the woods, General Mills leaving Midland. The list goes on and on. Every single one of us, and again, every single one on that side, has these stories as well. When you have a jurisdiction with the highest energy prices in North America, the highest payroll taxes in Canada and the highest-cost jurisdiction—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'll stick with the Auditor General. I realize that when the Auditor General presented these

facts, the Minister of Energy patted her on the head and said, "Now, now, you just don't know math." I remember. I was in the room that day watching him, in a condescending way, pat her on the head. I watched that.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce came out with a report titled—and I think the title kind of gives it away. They're talking about the state of Ontario's debt and deficit. The title of their report is *How Bad Is It?* I think it's pretty bad, and I think they know it.

Here's what they're saying. "Some experts are calling it a crisis," and they believe the government "should be taking every step" to balance their books. They also state, "Ontario's fiscal situation is becoming increasingly dire." Those are their words. Those are the words of the 60,000 businesspeople in Ontario: "increasingly dire." That's not very encouraging to hear. That is not what we need to hear from our business community. They go on to say, "We are likely to reach a state of crisis unless the province cuts spending and changes the ways it does business."

Well, what did we see last week? Some \$2.4 billion in more spending. That's not going to make the chamber of commerce or the families that work for all of the companies that are members of the chamber of commerce very happy. They asked to cut spending. They increased spending. They asked to change the way you do business and they just give you more of the same. That's what they're doing—more of the same.

Our leader spoke only a half hour ago about one of our five asks: to put the patient close to health care. What do these guys do? Some \$750 million is being spent on bureaucracy now, on 69 of these health links. As if the CCACs and the LHINs weren't enough, we now have the links to deal with.

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Speaker, they're putting people farther away from an MRI machine, a CAT scan or even a Band-Aid. They're putting people farther away and spending money to do it, bloating bureaucracy—\$750 million. They ask that you change the way you do business. What do these guys do? More of the same. Crank it out, spend more money: \$750 million on yet another level of bureaucracy.

The Fraser Institute had a study called Ontario's Debt Balloon. Again, the name kind of tells you where we are: Ontario's Debt Balloon. They calculate that 66% of the increase in debt since the 2000 recession is directly attributable to day-to-day expenses. This isn't about stimulus money to get the economy going, a one-time shot. This is paying the day-to-day bills. You can't run your family like that.

As our leader said, we're going to see Hydro One being sold off. That money coming in is just going to pay the bills. In business, we call that burning the furniture to heat the house. That's all it's going to do. What are you going to sell next year or the year after? You haven't fixed the problem. We call it a structural deficit. Well, that's a bit technical. What that means is you're paying for things you can't afford. That's one-time money. When you sell hydro, you don't have another one to sell. You're using that money to pay your day-to-day bills.

That's like at home. You can't pay your hydro bill that month, so you sell the china that your aunt gave you. You've got no more china to sell the next year. You're running out of things to sell off. That's no way to run your household—you'd never do that—and that's no way to run the province, but they use that credit card every day.

Can you imagine that? Sixty-six per cent of that money is to pay day-to-day bills. I don't hear anybody over there arguing. These are facts. Their expenses exceed their revenue on an annual basis. Every year, they spend more money that they don't have.

It also states in Ontario's Debt Balloon that Ontario's debt has grown by \$117 billion since the recession largely because of government borrowing to fund day-to-day expenses, not infrastructure investments. They tell you one thing, but they're doing the other. They're telling you what you want to hear, but the reality, the facts that come out eventually—when we can get at them—tell us the real story, the different story. Again, they're talking about selling hydro to pay for transit. Don't believe a word of that. That is not what's happening in Ontario.

Jamison Steeve is a name we remember from earlier. He's now at the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity and at the Martin Prosperity Institute at the U of T. He penned a Toronto Star column called "Ontario Needs Major Shift to Get Economy Back on Track." I'm actually going to agree with Jamison this time. He states, "Ontario's economy is not producing as much wealth as planned, hoped or expected.... It is time for Ontario to take a new course to grow the economy." But they didn't listen; more of the same.

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Yes, you're absolutely correct.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business told us that 97% of small businesses are concerned about the state of Ontario's economy, with 67% very concerned. In addition, 91% of small businesses want to see the provincial budget balanced by 2017-18. Why? Again, because they know that if there is this annual deficit, as we've seen it growing, hanging over their heads—they know darn well that these guys are coming in, putting their hand in their pocket and they're going to take more tax away from them. Business knows that. They do not want to locate in a jurisdiction that can't manage its own money because they know darn well they're going to come after them to pay their bills. That's what's happening.

One of the things that we saw in the budget here on page 199, if I remember correctly, is probably the most egregious yet surprising thing that we saw. I spent seven hours in the lock-up with our leader, reading through the budget page by page, trying to find something of excitement. My eyes popped when I came to page 199 and saw this chart. This chart here is called "Ontario's Record against Deficit Targets," a fancy name for, "Look at us; we did way better than we said we were going to do."

But Speaker, let me—this is the chart here in the budget on page 199. It starts with a deficit of \$24.7 billion. We've been able to determine that that is a fake number.

I'm going to read to you right from the briefing documents.

This was a briefing document that we obtained through the gas plant scandal hearings. The gas plant scandal hearings not only proved to us that the gas plant scandal itself cost \$1.1 billion, it also proved to us the level that this government would go to to keep us from ever learning the facts: Ctrl-Alt-Delete. Delete, delete, delete, delete, delete. We learned all about that.

But in the 300,000 pages—of course, I digress slightly, because the first day we got the documents after a punishingly long wait of many, many months—we finally got the documents, 36,000 of them dumped on us—almost everyone here, 30 of them, if my memory serves me correctly, including 12 cabinet ministers, stood on this floor telling us, "You have all the documents." I remember that. I'll digress just a bit because I have to get that out of my system.

Two weeks later, it was another one of those shuffling of the feet, "Mea culpa, we found 20,000 more documents." There they were; they must have been under the carpet. So they give us the 20,000. As we got into the scandal hearings, under sworn testimony from the Ontario Power Authority, we learned that they were told to keep those 20,000 documents from us ever seeing them. That's the kind of level that this government goes to to keep us from ever learning the facts.

So this chart on page 199—I can't believe they used it again, because we outed the fact that this chart is a fake. Yet they must not have had the right hand and the left hand talking to the chart-producing person, because they put the same fake chart in again.

"In one briefing document prepared as 'Confidential Advice to Cabinet,'" these were senior finance officials repeatedly warning the Premier "that the economy has not regained full strength since the recession, with higher unemployment and growth still dragging." This secret document stresses that the facts and figures presented in the 2014 budget are only "a plan" and are ... aspirational and notional figures—they're not real figures—

Mr. Jim McDonell: Imaginary figures.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —they're imaginary. Thank you. I'm still quoting—"with no substance behind them and confirms the government has no real plan to balance the budget.

"In fact, the Ministry of Finance admits" that this fake number here, the \$24.7-billion deficit, is complete fiction, "was never a real expectation" and "was a deliberate policy" to project "a worst-case outcome." In other words, it was deliberately faked. "They also admit 'the path to balance was then drawn from there, assuming a straight-line trajectory of declining deficits.'"

Now, what does all that technical mean? It means they started with a fake number, knew they had to get to zero, drew a straight line and just filled it in. That was their deficit planning. How much is the deficit next year? Well, where does the line cross? There it is; it's \$12.5 billion. That's how they budgeted.

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We presented this as a fake document, and they're still using the fake document. That tells us they have absolutely no idea over there what the real budget numbers are. If they had to revert to the fake document we've been talking about for two years, it's scary.

The ministry officials go on to say that "it was assumed that spending would be constrained to whatever it takes to hit these targets." That's what they said. They drew a line down until it got to zero—and you're going to constrain spending: "When you've spent \$12.5 billion, stop." They were assuming it. But we've got these guys; they don't know how to constrain spending. Somebody should have told the Ministry of Finance. Basically, someone laid a ruler across, drew a straight line and said, "That's it."

The finance officials also divulged, "Over the medium term, we have notional targets by sector that add up to the deficit numbers, but not yet full plans to deliver on them." That's saying that we think we know where we want to go but we have no idea how we're going to get there. This is how they base the budget, Speaker.

This is still a quote: "For the extended outlook, neither sector targets nor plans yet exist." So we think we know where we want to go in the short term, but we don't know how to get there. In the long term? We have no idea even where to go. That's what they're saying in here. This is the once-secret document that concluded, "in order to hit the deficit targets, spending growth going forward has to decrease dramatically." Speaker, they didn't get the memo. It's up \$2.4 billion.

So what do we see as a result of that? We see downgrades from Fitch, downgrades from Moody's, we see the Ontario Chamber of Commerce—which did a fascinating study of their business just recently. It just came out. They talked about three years ago, when confidence in the Ontario government was 48%. Last year it grew to 49%. This year, Speaker, it tumbled to 29%. Nobody believes them. Nobody believes a word that these folks are saying. Absolutely nobody believes a word that they're saying. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has told us, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has told us, and the phone calls from families tell us every day. The seniors that call us who don't know what's happening with their hydro bills—they don't understand it and never had to worry about that before. For 100 years nobody had to worry about a hydro bill. Today, it's a big issue around families' tables—that's those families that at least have a job.

This morning 500,000 men and women woke up in Ontario without a job—still without a job. Last month, over 25,000 people lost their full-time jobs in Ontario. This is the Ontario that has been created by the Liberal Party. This is the Ontario that we live in today. This is the Ontario that our party will not accept. We will not accept that.

Our leader and our members have provided viable, solid plans to change the economy.

Laughter.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Oh, I'm sorry, they're laughing at lowering energy rates, Speaker. I apologize somehow for the laughter. For daring to suggest—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: For daring to suggest that hydro bills should be affordable, we get a roar of laughter from the other side. They're laughing in the face of every family who cannot pay their hydro bill today. That's what they're laughing at, Speaker.

They're bringing forward a payroll tax—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —in their own secret documents, the payroll tax—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Barrie, come to order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I realize you don't like that document. It was disclosed long before you got here and it's going to be brought up every single day because it's one of the few pieces of truth we actually have. It took not only the Auditor General but it took a police investigation to get our hands on it. Thank God we at least have that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd just like to remind the member that when you're addressing in the Legislature, you address the Speaker, not other members in the Legislature. Thank you very much.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. I realize how it hurts the members on the other side to have that once-secret document brought forward that says that if you bring in a payroll tax, it's going to cost you 18,000 jobs, maybe 54,000 jobs, depending on how much they gouge out of us. They hate the fact that the document tells us about the 5,000 people who are going to lose their jobs immediately when they bring in their carbon tax. They hate the fact that we talk about the fact that their carbon tax is going to increase the price of gasoline three cents. These are all the things that our party stands against.

We brought forward five budget asks. None of the five were considered. In fact, as we discovered yesterday, as we sat through the budget schedule page by page—that budget schedule would have been written weeks, if not months, ago to divest hydro and other things. Speaker, this is their plan all along. For some reason, their idea is to hollow out the manufacturing sector in Ontario. Their idea is to send companies like Goodyear down to Mexico. That's what they're doing. They're sending Kellogg's elsewhere. They're sending Heinz elsewhere. They're sending Caterpillar back to the States to build. That's what they're doing, and that's what this budget will continue to do. That's why we will continue to stand up against all that is wrong in this budget. I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Bisson moves adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

ENDING COAL FOR CLEANER AIR ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ABANDON DU CHARBON POUR UN AIR PLUS PROPRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 21, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 9, An Act to amend the Environmental Protection Act to require the cessation of coal use to generate electricity at generation facilities / Projet de loi 9, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement pour exiger la cessation de l'utilisation du charbon pour produire de l'électricité dans les installations de production.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): When this item of business was last debated, the member from Niagara Falls had completed his speech.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Grant Crack: It's a pleasure to rise this morning in a follow-up to the passionate comments from the member from Niagara Falls.

Why are we introducing this particular act, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act, 2014? It's because this act reinforces our commitment—this government's commitment—to end the use of coal at existing generation facilities and ensures that any new stand-alone generating stations will not use coal.

Ontario's coal-fired plants over the years have cost the people of Ontario an estimated \$4.4 billion per year in health care, environmental and financial impacts.

In 2003, prior to our government taking office, coal accounted for 25% of our generation. I can proudly stand in front of the members here today and say that we've eliminated all coal-fired hydro generation in the province of Ontario.

This act would amend the Environmental Protection Act. It would prohibit the use of coal at Atikokan, Lambton, Nanticoke and Thunder Bay generating stations after 2014.

Speaker, Atikokan was taken offline in 2012 and was expected to return to service burning bio-mass in August 2014. Having spoken with the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, they're currently burning pellets, which is a great process that I actually use in my own home. I'm glad to see there's been another use for that particular facility in his riding.

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The province announced the cessation of coal use at the two units in Lambton in October 2013, and the units at Nanticoke stopped burning coal on December 31, 2013. The last coal plant, as I mentioned, the Thunder Bay Generating Station, stopped burning coal at the end

of 2014. This is great news. We can continue to move forward with new renewable energy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments. The member from Huron-Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Huron-Bruce; thank you very much. I thought you said "Durham East"; that's why I looked around.

With that, Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand up and contribute to the conversation on Bill 9, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act.

I just want to take this opportunity to recognize that we celebrated Earth Day last week. When I closed my comments last week, I suggested that Earth Day should be 365 days a year. I also recognized during my response to the minister that the PC Party of Ontario truly is an environmentally oriented party, although there are other folks who would try and suggest otherwise.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: We were the party that created the Ministry of the Environment. Some of the newer MPPs elected to this House maybe need to do their homework to realize what I'm saying is absolutely the truth. Another fact of the matter is, it was the PC Party of Ontario that actually closed the first coal plant, and that was under the wonderful leadership of Elizabeth Witmer.

Ladies and gentlemen of the House, we have to do all we can to ensure that we do indeed have cleaner air to breathe. But we also have to make sure we balance that with people's ability to pay. I say that because time and time again in my constituency, we're getting calls from families and seniors saying, "We can't afford our bills anymore." This is a worry, and I'm afraid that this Liberal government of the day has totally thrown these people under the bus.

Municipalities are now reaching out to distribution companies, LDCs, saying, "Look, please try not to cut seniors' and families' heat off during the winter." I question if the despair that is being created across Ontario is what the Liberals really had in mind.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: This is a case of the government filibustering itself. Is there anybody in this House who is opposed to the closure of coal plants in Ontario? No, each party has taken pretty well the same position. Have all the coal plants in Ontario been closed? They have. So we're now debating a bill that, quite frankly, probably doesn't need to be debated because we've already closed the coal plants. Every political party in Ontario has taken essentially the same position, and the government is moving this bill forward through the House.

So you have to ask yourself why. I think it's very simply this: This government is looking to put forward anything that seems to be progressive in the face of an austerity budget and the privatization of hydro. That's what this is all about. The government is trying to say, "Look at this shiny penny over here. Look how progressive we are. We're going to ban the use of coal in

Ontario.” Who here in this House is going to vote against that? Nobody. We’re all going to vote in favour.

But the point is that the government needs to do this because they have an austerity budget that they’ve essentially stolen from Tim Hudak’s last campaign document. They’re essentially doing what Tim Hudak said he was going to do in the last election except they’re trying to do it under the guise of being a progressive government, as the Premier says, governing from the progressive centre. Give me a break. If you have a cut and you lose jobs—and it’s probably going to be close to the numbers that Mr. Hudak proposed in the last election—I don’t see that as being progressive. I see that as being a pretty regressive move.

To sell off Ontario Hydro at a time when hydro rates have gone up by 320%, to sell it for \$4 billion that the province is going to get for infrastructure when we can do it a lot cheaper by other means—for example, cancelling the HST input clawback that the big corporations are going to get would more than pay for this. This is a shiny penny trying to say, “Look over here. Don’t pay attention to the unprogressive things that the Liberal government is doing.”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me pleasure to share some comments towards the member from Niagara Falls.

Some of the questions that I hear from the opposition—why are we doing this? Yes, the coal plants are closed. I think we’re all in agreement that we’re going to support this. But Speaker, we know that if legislation is not in place, things could change pretty quickly. Can they change the legislation in place? Yes, but it would be more difficult. Although today in this House we tend to have the same—

Interjection: The PCs would reopen them all.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I think what we’re doing is we’re trying to protect Ontarians.

Let me just tell you a little story that relates not necessarily just to coal plants, but to how cognizant our youth are today.

Just last fall, I went to see, with my grandson, the Belleville Bulls play for the last time—the last time. It’s a huge loss in Belleville. Driving home—he’s 10 years old.

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I wasn’t going to go there. Don’t worry; it’s okay. I’m not going to go there.

My 10-year-old grandson—there is a pulp and paper mill in Trenton, right by the river, one of the very few in southern Ontario. There’s steam coming out of the stack—I call it “steam” because they have a steam reformer, because that’s the environmentally friendly way to do things today. And my grandson says, “Grandpa, what’s all that smoke going up in the air?” So I say, “A.J., it’s not smoke. It’s steam.” I was explaining. He paused for a bit and he said, “Grandpa, you can call it whatever you want to call it, but it’s something that’s

going in the air and it’s bad for the environment.” Now, that’s a 10-year-old kid.

I would say to you that we’re doing this really to protect the future of my kids, my grandkids and my great-grandkids. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member for Niagara Falls for his final comments.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks to my friends and colleagues for their comments on Bill 9, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act.

Bill 9 formally ends the era of coal-fired stand-alone electricity generation in Ontario. The thing that’s most clear is that everyone really seems to enjoy the title of the bill. It sounds good. It’s something that we can pass. After all, who would be against cleaner air? The title of the bill allows you to give yourself a pat on the back, so why don’t we do that? Give yourselves a pat on the back. Go ahead.

One of the major errors here is that the bill does nothing proactive. As we have mentioned time and time again, the coal plants are already closed down. Just as this government is preparing to sell energy assets that belong to the people of this province to make some extra cash—and this is a point that was raised by my colleagues on the other side—a government may turn to coal to save money. So at the very least, this bill will put a stop to that and require consultation, with this legislation. Right now, that’s the best thing this bill is for. Other than that, it’s a pat on the back and does nothing else.

But really, what we should be discussing in this House—there are a lot more important things we could deal with this morning rather than legislating a problem that doesn’t exist. So I’m not sure why this bill was prioritized for this government, but it was.

Let’s think about what’s going on in the province of Ontario today. We have teachers on strike in Sudbury and Durham. We have auto workers in Oshawa who are worried about their job, in St. Catharines. We have CarePartner nurses in my riding of Niagara who are on strike because the employer will not deal with them. I met with those nurses on Saturday, and every patient came and told their story, how they’re not getting taken care of, how they’re showing up six and seven hours late to take care of their parents and their grandparents. That’s wrong. That’s what we should be discussing today. I appreciate the time, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: It’s my pleasure to stand in the House this morning on behalf of the people of Burlington to speak to the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act.

This act, along with so many other initiatives put forward by our government, puts the protection of Ontario’s environment and economy, and the health and well-being of our citizens, at the top of our priority list as a government.

If passed, this bill would legislate the protection of health and environmental benefits that come as a direct

result of eliminating the use of coal to produce our power.

Coal-fired generating stations produce some of the dirtiest power in the world. These facilities are amongst the largest producers of greenhouse gases, which, as we all know, are a significant contributor to global climate change.

In my riding of Burlington, Speaker, we came face to face with the impacts of climate change last August when a one-in-100-year storm brought 200 millimetres of rain on my community in just a few hours, impacting over 3,000 homes and causing close to \$100 million in damage.

Our government's decision to eliminate all coal-fired generating stations, a prime indication of our commitment to preserving our environment for the enjoyment of future generations, is the largest initiative of its kind anywhere in North America. This underscores our commitment to make Ontario greenhouse gas emissions as low as we can, prioritizing Ontarians' health and mitigating environmental damage to buildings, crops and ecosystems.

I will reference health in a moment, and I will be joined shortly by my colleague the member from Cambridge, who, as a nurse, can speak very well to the increased number of intakes in emergency departments as a consequence of asthma and what getting rid of coal has meant to those numbers.

To achieve this, it's not simply enough to eliminate all facilities that currently use the burning of coal as a way of generating power. We must also ensure that these types of facilities cannot be built and/or operated at any point in the future. Opponents of this legislation will point out that there's regulation that exists already which eliminates the use of coal in power generating in existing locations, but it fails to address any new facilities that may one day be built. This bill does just that: It will prevent the use of coal for producing power at any facility in Ontario, plain and simple, safeguarding our health and well-being now and that of future generations.

This issue does not only affect our environment; it also has a significant impact on the economy. The costs associated with these types of facilities are estimated to be \$4.4 billion per year. This includes both short- and long-term health effects attributed to poor air quality, pollution and climate change. Since we shut down the coal-powered plants, as I mentioned, we've had fewer smog alerts, and as someone who suffers from asthma and lives in a riding where close to one in five citizens is a senior, I certainly appreciate—and I know these vulnerable citizens do too—the impact this legislation and this initiative alone has had on our quality of life. This initiative has no added cost to it, only the added benefit of reducing costs.

Businesses that rely on the use of coal for other processes and production need not fear, however, as this bill will only apply to facilities that use coal for the primary purpose of generating electricity. Companies that use coal or its by-products in the production of metals, for example, will be able to continue their operations as normal. There's no intention of banning the use of coal for

these purposes, as there are currently no alternates. Advances in technology must be made before such a step could be made without having significant negative economic impact on Ontario.

This is not to mention the potential long-term health and environmental impacts which we have not yet seen. We have already made inroads into our understanding of these effects but it is difficult to know what will happen in the decades to come. All over the world, governments are making the decision to move away from the use of coal in their power generation facilities, and I am proud to be part of a government that is leading the way. By becoming the first jurisdiction in North America to completely do away with coal generation and ensure that it can never be used again, Ontario is taking the equivalent of up to seven million cars off the road. This legislation will do much to ensure that our health and enjoyment of our natural beauty and environment that we have come to love and treasure as Ontarians, and expect in our province as well, are protected for the enjoyment of all Ontarians for generations to come.

Thank you very much for this opportunity, Speaker. I appreciate the chance to speak to this very important piece of legislation.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): In fairness to the next speaker, so that she's not interrupted—it is almost 10:15 at this point in time—the Legislature will be recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to introduce my wife, Jane, who's here today. She's here because our granddaughter, Madison, is page captain today. But she's also very proud—she's a councillor in the township of Severn. She and I—we're bragging about this now, Mr. Speaker—won the log-sawing contest at the Elmvale Maple Syrup Festival on Saturday in record time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I'm also told she's going to watch how you behave today.

Introduction of guests?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to welcome Kevin Gillis to the Legislature this morning. Kevin is the father of page Mira Gillis. Normally, Mira would be attending St. Anne French immersion school in Windsor, but today, she is our other page captain. Her dad is here on this special occasion, so welcome, Kevin.

He also owns about five harness racehorses, so if anyone on the other side wants to talk harness racing, Kevin's the guy to have that conversation with.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order, Speaker: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear ribbons in recognition of the National Day of Mourning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to wear ribbons for a National Day of Mourning. Do we agree? Agreed.

The pins are available in both lobbies.

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: On a point of order: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each caucus to speak on the National Day of Mourning and that we observe a moment of silence following our remarks.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi is seeking unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each caucus to speak on the National Day of Mourning and that we observe a moment of silence following the remarks. Do we agree? Agreed.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. I will be sharing my time with the government House leader.

Speaker, April 28 is observed across Canada as the National Day of Mourning. On this day, we remember and honour the thousands of men and women who have been killed or injured on the job. Today, we also pay our respects to the families and friends whose lives have been affected by a workplace tragedy.

On behalf of the government, I would like to express my deepest sympathies to those affected by the tragedy of workplace injuries and fatalities. One life lost is one too many.

April 28 was chosen as the day of mourning because on this day in 1914, the Workmen's Compensation Act was given third reading in this Legislature. Since the 1980s, Ontario has been recognizing the day of mourning. Today, the day of mourning is recognized in more than 100 countries around the world.

This morning, the Premier and the Minister of Labour are attending a National Day of Mourning ceremony at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. They will remember and honour those workers who have died, been injured or suffered illness in the workplace.

They will also renew our commitment to the promotion of healthy and safe workplaces and the prevention of future fatalities. Our government understands that when workplace tragedies happen, lives are devastated, forever changed. Families, co-workers, whole communities are faced with the very painful reality that their loved one is not coming home or will never be again. These tragedies are immeasurable.

Our government understands that no job is worth a life or an injury, and that more needs to be done to make sure everyone comes home from work safe and sound.

I would now like to give my honourable colleague the government House leader and Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services the opportunity to speak about this important day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I would also like to express my deepest sympathies to those affected by the tragedy of workplace injuries and fatalities.

Our government understands that we must make sure that the culture of every workplace in Ontario prioritizes the health and safety of its workers. Every person in every workplace has an important role to play. By working together, we can make sure people come home from work at the end of the day.

I want to acknowledge the work that's being done by Ontario's Ministry of Labour and the minister on this important issue. The Minister of Labour will be making a statement in the House later on this important topic, but I want to highlight a few things we have been doing as a government.

The Ministry of Labour, in partnership with our labour and employer partners, is transforming workplace health and safety in the province. And we are making progress. Over the last 10 years we have reduced injuries by 40% in Ontario. This has made Ontario one of the safest places to work in Canada.

We have also been changing how we look at mental health injuries because we know a mental stress injury, such as PTSD, can be as damaging to a person as a physical injury. That's why the Minister of Labour hosted a summit on workplace mental stress on March 5. Minister Flynn brought together workers and experts from a wide range of sectors and participants to share innovative approaches, best practices on how to reduce stigma by promoting cultural change, and learned from industry leaders how to enhance the mental health and safety of employees.

It's also worth noting that the government is investing \$4.4 million to help the OPP establish an employee wellness section, which will dedicate resources to address mental health issues among members, retirees and their families.

Our government has doubled the number of workplace health and safety inspectors in Ontario. Earlier this month, we took action to prevent falls in the construction sector by making new working-at-heights training mandatory. Also, we are continuing to conduct inspection blitzes throughout the year to raise safety awareness and help prevent injuries and fatalities.

We are making progress on all these fronts. We will continue to work hard to make a difference for workers in Ontario.

Despite this progress, there are still too many people who have been killed or injured on the job. Our work is far from done.

I would like to close by again acknowledging the women and men who have lost their lives or have been injured on the job, as well as their families, friends and colleagues. Our government is standing with you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further statements?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is my pleasure and distinct honour to represent the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus in discussing today the provincial and National Day of Mourning. I congratulate the Deputy Premier and the government House leader for their words.

Today we are gathered, and we will be gathered again this afternoon, to remember workers who didn't make it home from their jobs. In this country, when someone leaves for work, we expect that they will come home, but tragically in many cases they do not.

I'm going to give you an example. On May 9, 1992, when I was a grade 11 student in a small town called New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, at 5:36 a.m., our community awoke to one of the biggest mine disasters in the world's history, the Westray mine disaster. It was a brand new mine, and in the early morning of that Sunday, that explosion of methane gas changed that community forever. I remember that the other students in my class, my younger sister, in fact, even my father, who was a town councillor at the time, worried. In a small town like that, everyone knew somebody who worked at that mine, or was likely related to them.

The opening of the mine brought people from around the world to work in a small town in Pictou county, Nova Scotia, because there were jobs. Unfortunately that work site was not safe, and 26 men, aged from their early twenties into their fifties, died that day.

We would go to school for the following week as they talked openly in public about identifying people's dental records. We would be in class—I was in law class; I was taking a grade-12 law class in grade 11—and our teacher took the time to walk us through what this meant for our community. I remember politicians coming in from across Canada into the New Glasgow stadium, to fill that place as if it were the biggest funeral I had ever attended. I'm sure every single person in the community was there.

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I raise the Westray mine disaster in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, here today for a reason, because it was that national tragedy in that small town, impacting 26 families and, by extension, an entire country, that changed legislation nationally for better worker protection—Bill C-45.

Years later, I would go on to work at Parliament Hill as a young staffer—very junior. I remember with pride the Westray miners who would come up and lobby the government for change, for greater protection. The Westray mine example speaks to what is so bad that was actually changed, because there were, before that, no criminal protections for any worker, prior to that. The people of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, and in fact, I think, all of Canada would go on to see the changes that would need to be made to make workplaces safe.

I commend all members of this assembly for greater workplace safety. I would also like to commend the Canadian Labour Congress for their vision on this back in 1984.

As we today speak and remember the people who didn't come home from work or, as the government House

leader said, may have post-traumatic stress disorder, I think it's important that we continue to understand that lives aren't simply changed by legislation; enforcement may also protect them.

My experience when I was growing up is something that I hope no other community ever has to experience. It's important that, I think, we learn from those lessons to make sure that people do come home from work.

Later this afternoon, our colleague the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington will speak on behalf of the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus. He is right now with the Premier and the minister. He will add his views to why it's important to remember each year on April 28, on the National Day of Mourning.

But before I end, I think it's also important that we share a focus on rehabilitating and reintroducing workers back into the workforce. Our goal should always be to have people using their talents to provide for themselves and their families and to live a long, happy, prosperous and healthy life.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further statements.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is my honour to stand in this House today on the National Day of Mourning to reflect on the people, women and men, who have been killed and injured on the job—on this day, April 28, which we do every single year, to speak on behalf of the Ontario New Democratic caucus as we join with workers across Ontario to mark this day.

Today we stand not only as a caucus ourselves but with other members of this Legislature and with people around our province and around our country. We stand with friends and family to remember those who have been injured, maimed or killed on the job.

We all have a responsibility to make sure that when the workday ends, every single worker makes it home safely after their shift, after their time at work. In Ontario last year, 349 people were killed on the job, thousands were injured, and countless more people dealt with complications due to work-related illnesses and disease. These numbers reflect an unacceptable trend of deaths over the last few years and hundreds, if not thousands, of injuries.

In 2012, 298 workers lost their lives. In 2011, it was 349 workers. In 2010, it was 398 workers, and on and on—far too many people. These are the people who lost their lives. These are the families who lost loved ones. As I said, there are thousands and thousands of others, not reflected in those numbers of people, who were exposed to environmental toxins and who were exposed to stresses in the workplace that led to PTSD. Speaker, many more people were felled with illnesses and with diseases—as those also who were killed.

As a province, we have a duty not only to honour these women and men but actually to ensure that our obligation stretches to make a difference for the future of workers in this province. We do this by making sure, for example, that workplace safety standards actually reflect the changing workplaces that we have in the province of Ontario—workplaces, for example, in construction,

manufacturing, mining, firefighting and other hazardous places.

Speaker, in 2009, you may recall that there was a fall on a construction site that led to something called the Dean report, which was commissioned by the government back in 2010. This is a report specifically for workers who are working in high places in the construction industry. We know that in 2014, four years after that initiative, we had seven workers die from high falls in the construction industry. Something is still not working. We saw a couple of deaths just in the last couple of weeks on construction sites in this province. There is something that is still not right when it comes to making sure that these workers are protected on the job.

I'm proud to stand with a caucus that has been working to ensure that this province has greater workplace protections, helping first responders get recognition and treatment for post-traumatic stress disorders, for example; protecting child performers on the job; protecting the rights of interns in the workplace; and many, many other initiatives that New Democrats have brought to this chamber in recent years as well as historically.

Too often, this government has been dragging its feet on some of the most important health and safety measures. It's important to acknowledge that today, because if we don't acknowledge it, we're not going to fix it for the future.

We have now recommendations that have come from a review of the mining health and safety act. It had been 30 years since the mining health and safety act had been reviewed. The workers in that industry were pressuring the government for years and years. In fact, they were calling for a public inquiry because it was so bad, the changes that had happened in the mining industry not being reflected in the language that was supposed to be the legislation that protected those workers on the job.

Now what the government needs to do is act quickly on the recommendations that come from that review that they took on. I congratulate the government for finally taking that review on and doing that work and doing that consultation, but that's not good enough. The changes that are recommended have to be implemented.

Every injury, every death in the workplace is one too many, but every year we see these tragic events on the construction site, on the factory floor, in the field, underground and on the front lines. Families in the north and across the industrial heartland in rural areas and in our cities are left to pick up the pieces of their lives when their loved ones are suddenly taken from them at work.

Every Ontarian has the right to safely earn a living. Every worker is entitled to the same protection, but the explosion of part-time and precarious work leaves far too many workers vulnerable to greater workplace risks and leaves them with fewer protections to speak up about workplace safety, for fear of losing their jobs.

Every working person in Ontario, and their families, deserves the right of peace of mind. No Ontarian should ever have to worry if a loved one will go to work and never return.

New Democrats are committed to strong safety regulations and enforcement. We're committed to working with employers, unions, safety specialists, WSIB and the government to make Ontario's workplaces safer for every Ontarian. We can't stop until workplace accidents stop. Until then, we mourn for the dead and we fight for the living.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the members for their statements.

At this time, we have been asked, in the unanimous consent, to spend a moment of silence. I would ask all members of the House to please rise in respect of the National Day of Mourning.

The House observed a moment's silence.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, on page 288 of the budget it clearly shows that the Canada Health Transfer has increased by \$652 million this year. That is money the federal government has specifically earmarked for health care in Ontario.

On page 289 of the budget it shows that the Ontario health budget only increased by \$598 million. That means there is \$54 million missing. That means you took \$54 million from the health care budget to pay for your fiscal mismanagement. It's exactly what the auditor said recently was going to start happening because of your high debts and deficits. You're crowding out important programs; in this case, health care.

Minister, what did you do with the \$54 million the federal government gave you specifically for health care?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think the member opposite, being a former health minister, probably knows that the Canada Health Transfer only represents about a quarter of the health expenditures in this province, roughly \$13 billion out of \$50 billion dedicated to provincial health care this fiscal year.

For example, in 2014-15, the federal government transferred \$473 million, but health spending went up by \$1.2 billion. So the federal transfer doesn't even come close to filling that hole, and the imbalance will even increase in the coming years. In 2017-18—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. That round was the freebie.

Carry on.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: That sharing between federal and provincial that used to be 50-50 is down to 25% from the federal government. That imbalance that we're seeing, which is going to get worse in 2017-18, will remove \$21 billion from health care transfers nationally and \$8 billion in Ontario alone.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Minister of Finance: You can spin this all you want, but they gave you \$652 million and your total budget only went up by \$598 million. Somehow, somebody along the way stole \$54 million out of health care. This is the equivalent—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's too edgy. I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Withdraw.

Fifty-four million dollars is the equivalent of 9,000 long-term-care beds. A constituent of mine is desperately waiting for a long-term-care bed; however, none are available. Because of the long waiting list, this resident is in a retirement home—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's a true story. That home is costing his family over \$7,000 a month to cover the cost of the care he needs. That is care he could be receiving if you didn't divert \$54 million of health care money to something else.

I say to the minister again: Why did you cut your share of health care funding when we need more long-term-care beds, for example?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As I mentioned, that 50-50 sharing that used to exist between ourselves and the feds is now down to a 25% contribution, which is going down even substantially—that \$21-billion hole nationally that is about to face us.

I would suggest to the member opposite that that individual in his riding could get the support they need if he had actually started advocating for Ontario instead of the federal Conservative government so that Ontario gets its share, because the federal government has abdicated its responsibility to actually provide support to the province based on the changing demographics.

In fact, the federal Parliamentary Budget Officer has suggested that the federal government has pretty well insulated itself from the fiscal impact of an aging population. We can't and we won't do that in this province. I would hope that the PC Party would advocate on behalf of Ontarians instead of the federal PC Party.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Transportation, second time.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd say to the minister that in my first month as health minister in 1995, Paul Martin had the health transfer down to 13%. You're getting 25% from the federal government.

It's \$54 million that has gone missing. They gave you that money. What did you do with the money? It's a pretty simple question. That could have paid for the 20 new hospices that you promised in last year's budget and have done nothing about, including Matthews House

Hospice in Alliston. You could use it to build new nursing home beds. You haven't built one new nursing home bed or long-term-care bed in 12 years. Instead, you took that precious federal money that was given to you, \$54 million, and frittered it away on your fiscal mismanagement.

I'll ask you again, Minister: Where did the \$54 million of health care money that the federal government gave to you go?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As I mentioned, this fiscal year alone, health care spending in this province went up by \$1.2 billion. The federal contribution to that was less than the 50% that it used to be. It was \$473 million, which left a large gap—a gap which is only going to increase over time as the federal government continues to abdicate their responsibility to address the changing demographics in this province and across the country.

I implore the member opposite, the interim leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, to advocate on behalf of Ontarians and not defend the federal government; to stand up for Ontarians, stand up for health care in this province, and don't back up the federal government as they continue to withdraw providing that important service.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning. My question is for the Minister of Finance.

Your team has been busy for weeks, if not months, stripping away any transparency in our hydro sector. Your budget details reveal quite a story. The moment even one single share is sold, Hydro One will not be deemed an agency of the crown any longer.

Schedule 3 strips the Auditor General of powers—no more value-for-money audits over there. Schedule 10 cuts out the Financial Accountability Officer after six months. In schedule 11, the Financial Administration Act is amended to limit our ability to obtain any information on Hydro One.

Minister, what's happening here is the wholesale stripping of access to any information about an asset the people are the largest shareholder of. Is that your idea of being open and transparent?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We are taking advantage of a crown corporation of Ontario—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville, the member from Oxford and the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound will come to order, and there are a few others I could get.

Hon. Charles Sousa: —to maximize the value of this corporation and make it into a growth corporation, recognizing that we can do better. As a result of that, we're reinvesting dollar for dollar all the gains that are realized from the broadening of that ownership. We're making an

initial public offering in the months to come, so that we can do the first 50% tranche, which will be applied to the consolidated debt as well as the Trillium Trust, in order for us to reinvest it into transportation, to garner even greater return and again start to employ and make another valuable asset for the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, that is an appropriate thing for us to do. The member opposite actually agrees with that, because they've advocated for these kinds of opportunities—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's clear you don't want us to know anything your government is really up to. We had to scrounge for files in the gas plant scandal hearings, only to find that many were deleted. You've taken care of that early this time on the Hydro One sale. You've made sure we have no access to anything Hydro One-related. In schedule 13, freedom of information no longer applies to Hydro One. We don't get to know a thing. Minister, you gave FIPPA the flippa.

Schedule 38 removes Hydro One from the sunshine list. That was one of the most controversial disclosures last year.

This is one way, Minister, for you to stop the flow of information. Is that your idea of being open and transparent?

1100

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, our idea is to ensure that we will have oversight—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew and member from Simcoe North, come to order. I'm not going to have people shouted down in this place.

Carry on.

Hon. Charles Sousa: We will have oversight. We are appointing a new ombudsman. There is going to be the structure of an initial public offering. There's going to be an AGM. There are going to be requirements for disclosure in that regard. We also recognize the discipline that's required in respect to the release of documents and financial requirements of the public corporation that would be established.

Mr. Speaker, what we are not doing is the lack of oversight that occurred with the sale of the 407. We're ensuring that the public is protected, and we're taking an incremental approach to what's necessary with respect to the broadening of ownership of Hydro One—for the benefit, ultimately, of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, no AG, no FAO, no FIPPA, and now under schedule 22, lobbyists don't have to register any longer. Schedule 23 excludes Hydro One from the oversight of the Management Board of Cabinet Act. Schedule 28 takes Hydro One out of municipal freedom of information. Schedule 30 guarantees the Ombudsman would no longer be able to investigate Hydro One; you're going to put your own person in that role. Schedule 37 means no more Integrity Commissioner.

Well, considering there's no integrity left in the system, you won't need any of those officers.

Minister, at what point does shame kick in?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Minister.

Hon. Charles Sousa: What was shameful is the way that the member opposite and his party sold away Highway 407 for a song, and we're still paying for it today. What is shameful is what they did when they tried to dismantle the hydro system, which has left a legacy of debt to us still today. We are doing what's correct to try to bolster the value of the corporation. We're implementing parameters as well as structure to ensure that disclosure is done and fully transparent.

The member opposite knows that full well. He's just playing politics. We're playing for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the deputy leader. Selling Hydro One is the wrong decision. Ontarians know it. If the Premier was so proud of her plan, she'd actually be calling it what it is, which is a sell-off.

But the Premier knows that Ontarians don't want her to sell off Hydro One. That's why she uses terms like "optimization" or "unlocking value" instead.

Will the Liberals finally admit that selling Hydro One is the wrong plan for the people of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, what is the right plan for the people of Ontario is that we make the necessary investments in infrastructure. This is all about building new infrastructure.

I know the leader of the third party is planning to hit the road to talk to people about this issue. When she goes to Brampton, I really hope she's going to ask how they feel about the \$1.6-billion investment in the Hurontario-Main LRT. I wonder what they'll say about that. I wonder, when she goes to Hamilton, what the people there will have to say about the investment in rapid transit there.

Speaker, the truth is that Ontario needs this kind of investment in infrastructure. Our economy depends upon it, and people depend upon it because they're spending too much time in traffic when they could be at home with their families.

When you go across this province, to the leader of the third party, I'm asking—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what people need is affordable reliable hydro, not a sell-off to Bay Street. That's what people need.

During last summer's election, the Premier kept Ontarians in the dark about her plan to sell of Hydro One. New Democrats did launch a campaign; thank you for recognizing that. We launched it yesterday so that Ontarians could actually make their voices heard. In the last 24

hours, more than 2,000 Ontarians have sent a pretty clear message: People don't want to pay the price for more wrong decisions by the Premier. They do not like her sell-off plan.

Will the Liberals actually listen to the people of Ontario? Will they listen to those folks instead of their friends on Bay Street and pull the plug on this terrible, terrible plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think it's time that the leader of the third party came clean about what infrastructure projects she would cancel. As she travels the province, I hope she will come forward and say which ones are on the cutting block. Will it be Connecting Link? Talk about listening to people. Connecting Link is a very important program that we're restoring, because we heard about it. Will it be—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The banter back and forth is not appreciated, especially when someone is trying to answer.

Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Will you be cancelling 15-minute service from Union Station to Bramalea? Will you cancel the northern highway projects? Will you end the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund?

Governing is about making decisions. It's easy to criticize, but we want to hear your plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Nobody believes a word this Liberal government says. That's the bottom line. I can't say anything else, Speaker. That's the bottom line.

Selling Hydro One is going to mean higher bills for Ontarians. Hydro One is simply too important to give away, and once the Premier gives Hydro One away, we will never, ever be able to get it back.

Why are the Liberals plowing ahead with a plan that they have no reason for, no mandate for and that people do not want?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I know the member opposite is saying that this will increase rates. I really think she needs to be clear that the Ontario Energy Board will continue to set rates. Nothing is changing. Nothing is changing when it comes to rates.

The Ontario Energy Board has made decisions that have decreased rates in March just this year. The Ontario Energy Board decreased rates by between \$100 and \$168 for Enbridge and Union Gas customers.

In 2010, Hydro One asked for a rate increase for distribution; the OEB ordered a 9% reduction in a capital request. In 2012, Hydro One asked for a rate increase for transmission; the OEB ordered a 3% decrease.

So nothing is changing when it comes to rates, and I think that the party opposite needs to be honest with the people of this province that that argument just does not hold water.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I really didn't think the Liberals could get even more out of touch, but here we have it.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my next question is for the Deputy Premier. Can the Deputy Premier, the chair of the Treasury Board, justify spending nearly \$7 million on high-priced consultants to help the Liberals sell off Hydro One?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, when our government was making the decision around expanding the ownership of Hydro One, we did want to do it in a careful and thoughtful way. We wanted to protect ratepayers. We wanted to protect taxpayers.

One of the things that I think the member opposite needs to understand is that we will be the largest shareholder of Hydro One. We will have a 40% ownership; the next-largest owner would have a maximum of 10%. Key decisions require a two-thirds vote. We will have 40%, and key decisions require a two-thirds vote. We are protecting ratepayers, and we are protecting taxpayers.

Speaker, we are looking to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And now I'll say it: The member from Windsor—Tecumseh, come to order.

Carry on.

1110

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said, Ontario will remain the largest shareholder, with a minimum of 40%. The next highest owner would have a maximum of 10%. Key decisions require a two-thirds vote.

All of Hydro One's officers will be required to reside in Ontario. The Ontario Grid Control Centre—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, with Liberal math, this side should be the government side here in the Legislature.

The Liberals have spent nearly \$7 million on high-priced consultants to help them figure out how to sell Hydro One. They paid millions to KPMG, McKinsey, Deloitte, PricewaterhouseCoopers and a company called Feschuk.Reid, which is Paul Martin's old speech writers. But the Premier's office won't even tell us what work these companies did or what information they provided.

Will the Deputy Premier, head of the Treasury Board, make these consultants' reports public so that Ontarians can see what they say about rates, about reliability, about the billions of dollars of lost revenues this province will be facing when you sell off our hydro utility?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the leader of the third party has said quite proudly that she has no faith in

the private sector. That might explain why they have no faith in her or her party.

We are moving forward to broaden the ownership because we are committed to building infrastructure. I have heard in southwestern Ontario about the importance of Connecting Links. I have heard this at AMO. I am sure you have heard this as well. We are restoring Connecting Links to provide that much-needed relief.

We're building transit. We're building infrastructure. We are increasing service on the GO line. This is exactly the kind of infrastructure investment that this province needs, and we need to bring all our resources available to us in order to make that infrastructure investment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Liberals have hired some of the most expensive accounting firms in Canada. They've hired a management consulting firm that says this about itself: "We're incredibly expensive...." And they hired Paul Martins's speech writers. Selling Hydro One is really good for Bay Street and apparently it's great for consultants, but it's absolutely the wrong thing for Ontarians.

The Deputy Premier says there is no money for health care; there is no money for education; there is no money for child care. Can the Deputy Premier really justify spending \$7 million on high-priced consultants to help the Liberals sell Hydro One? Really? When will this Premier and this Liberal government actually get its priorities straight?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, we actually have a lot of faith in the potential of Hydro One. We think that, with this restructured system and with the incentives to get LDCs to come together, we will have a more efficient electricity system. That will take pressure off rate increases.

We have been open and transparent about this, contrary to what the leader of the third party says. In fact, included in the 2014 Liberal platform, the 2014 Ontario budget included reference to maximizing assets. Whether she knows it or not, she ran on that plan too. In October—

Interjections.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Yes, actually, you did.

In October, the advisory council released their interim report. The final report was made public before the budget. We've been debating this issue in the House for months. That will continue. Proposed legislation will be subject to public hearings and debate.

We believe this is the right thing to do because Ontario needs the investment in infrastructure, and they need it now.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In case you didn't catch on, I was stopping the bantering going back and forth, and I'll wait for it to finish before we carry on with question period.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, no, it's going both ways.

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Education.

Another day goes by and the minister shirks responsibility. Next week, there will be another 42,000 secondary school students not in the classroom—that's from the Peel board. Yesterday, when interviewed, the minister said, "It's up to the union local" and also "what is the local issue" and "the responsibility of the ... local," all in the span of one sentence. No one is blaming the strikes on the local issues except the minister.

Minister, will you admit right now that students are out of the classrooms because of a dozen years of Liberal mismanagement? Exactly who are you blaming for the mess you are actually in today?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to go over the legislation one more time. The legislation—

Mr. John Yakabuski: The buck stops with you, Minister.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—I've got to do this officially. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Liz Sandals: The School Boards Collective Bargaining Act describes quite clearly that some issues are to be determined at the central table—generally, issues around money and provincial policy—and that other issues are to be determined at the local table.

The School Boards Collective Bargaining Act also makes it very clear that there can be a central strike on issues that are being negotiated at the central table and there can be a local strike on issues that are being negotiated at a local table.

The locals in seven boards requested local conciliation, and they are local strikes. That's what the law says. That's the process that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Minister, your answer today and your comments yesterday shrug off and ignore your responsibility as the Minister of Education.

Next Monday, six days from now, some 80,000 Ontario secondary students will be out of the classroom. On May 10, or just 14 days from now, there's a possibility that 817,000 elementary school students could be out of the classroom. Surely you do not think for one moment that you are not fully responsible for what is happening to the classrooms here in Ontario.

Minister, what are you prepared to do to get our students back in the classroom so that no one loses their school year?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Hon. Liz Sandals: My responsibility is to ensure that we get a negotiated central collective agreement, because the government of Ontario, the crown, sits at the central table only. In fact, my responsibility is to make sure we get that negotiated central agreement, and that's exactly what I'm doing: working with the parties from a variety

of unions to work on central—which is a lot better than what they would do, Speaker, because they said they would fire 22,700 education workers. I don't think that's how to solve the problem. I think negotiated collective agreements are how to solve the problem.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Deputy Premier.

Selling Hydro One will pay for less than 3% of the Liberals' transit and infrastructure promises, but the Premier is doing it anyway, even though she has no mandate and no good reason—although we just heard that Bay Street has already benefited from this plan. She promises the money will go into the Trillium Trust.

While the Premier says one thing, her Harper-style omnibus bill says something completely different. The money from the sale of Hydro One is going directly into consolidated revenues. There's nothing in the budget bill that says this money must be spent on infrastructure.

Are the Liberals are just trying to spin Ontarians so that they'll buy into this misguided scheme to sell off Hydro One?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'm afraid that the member opposite is misinformed because, of the \$9 billion estimated for the sale of part of Hydro One, approximately \$5 billion will go towards the debt. The book value will go to the debt. The remaining will go into the Trillium Trust, and the Trillium Trust is earmarked for infrastructure projects.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: We had our briefing yesterday. Perhaps you should read this budget book because the Trillium Trust Act is key, obviously, to the Premier's asset sale plan, yet the Premier's budget provided no guarantee that the money from the sale of Hydro One will actually go to transit. It looks like the Premier is creating a loophole so that the money doesn't have to go into the Trillium Trust. Who knows where this money will end up?

If their own budget doesn't put money directly into the Trillium Trust, why is the Liberal government trying to spin Ontarians about needing to sell off Hydro One?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think what the member opposite is failing to make is the connection between investments in infrastructure and transit, and the need to maximize the value of our assets. They are directly linked. The evidence of that is in the projects that we are moving forward with.

I do believe the member opposite knows that her community—the mayors and the regional chair from Kitchener-Waterloo—have advocated very strongly for enhanced infrastructure investments. That money isn't going to come out of thin air. There is no pixie dust. When you build infrastructure, you have to pay for it. We're figuring out how to pay for it so we can build it, because people need it and they need it now.

YOUTH SERVICES

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last week in the budget, the crux of the budget was about building up Ontario and building up the people of Ontario. When I listened to the Minister of Finance stand in the House and announce \$250 million over the next two years to continue funding Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy, it was a clear statement of this government's commitment to invest in the talent and skills of Ontario's youth. I'm very proud to be part of a government that continues to invest in our young people and their minds, and nurtures and encourages them.

Many of the young minds we venture to support come from at-risk communities, where it can be much easier to miss opportunities for a brighter and more prosperous future.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, can she provide some insight as to what the government is doing to support these youth in reaching their full potential?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for a great question, a very important question.

Our budget clearly has focused on building up Ontario's youth. Our historic and future investments in the youth jobs strategy will continue to help Ontario's young people secure important job opportunities; however, there are many at-risk youth in our province. I was very happy that we've taken action to broaden and enhance the work we began under the youth action plan.

In this budget we are expanding the youth action plan with \$14 million this year alone and ramping up to \$20 million in 2016-17. We'll be investing in community-oriented programs to reduce the root cause of violence. Our youth outreach workers—a great program—will build relationships with at-risk youth in the middle years throughout our entire province. It is going to be a great continued investment to help all of our youth succeed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I want to thank the minister for her answer and all the encouraging news about how we continue to support and bolster the success of at-risk youth in Ontario.

I can see the results of these programs in my own riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. Through the Youth Opportunities Fund, the peer mentorship project at the Franklin Horner Community Centre is providing a variety of activities to help youth overcome barriers that might prevent them from reaching their full potential. These programs include team sports, painting, sculpting, cooking, dance classes—all taught with positive role models to help our at-risk youth.

Can the minister please share with this House how our new investments will build upon and intensify the success we've already realized from the initial youth action fund?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: The new investments in our budget really build on the work that was started by my colleague, the Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins, when he

was at children and youth services. I want to acknowledge the work he started in 2012.

Since then we've created over 27,000 youth opportunities, and our violent crime rate has decreased by 30% since 2003, so Ontario now has the second-lowest youth violent crime rate in the country.

We invested in employment and training programs like the Youth in Policing Initiative, to give opportunity to youth to thrive through great programs, arts programs and sports.

We've done all of this under the first youth action plan, and because of it, we will have more youth on a good path to adulthood. I look forward to continuing this legacy.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, we've warned you of the suffering that you've inflicted through your reckless hydro policies. Our offices have been inundated with messages from residential and commercial ratepayers, who have no idea how they'll deal with the ever-increasing energy burden you've laid upon them.

To make matters worse, on Friday, rates are going up a staggering 15%. That's 15% on electricity that was already way too high.

Skyrocketing rates are an enormous drain on manufacturing and small businesses. They kill jobs and send them to other jurisdictions. Yet you're still bent on signing expensive energy contracts for intermittent, unreliable power.

Minister, will you stop doubling down on your failed energy experiments and enact a consumers-first energy plan that protects Ontario hydro ratepayers?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I appreciate the questions that I get from my Conservative critic. He's often bombastic, and he often has a very different interpretation of reality.

The announcement that was made by the Ontario Energy Boards was not 15%. What he really fails to appreciate is that when he says that we have the highest electricity prices—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I believe the member would really like to be able to ask his supplementary. Finish, please.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: When he says we have the highest electricity prices in Canada, he's wrong. When he says we have the highest prices in North America, he's wrong. We have invested \$34 billion in this system to make it reliable, after they ran it into the dump—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, we're going to disagree.

Minister, once the new rates come into effect this Friday, Ontario will have the highest electricity rates in Canada. That's right. We're now surpassing that industrial powerhouse, Prince Edward Island, in having the most uncompetitive rates in the country.

Your arrogant mismanagement of the hydro system has real-world consequences. Just ask the people of Napanee, who are losing out to Mexico with Goodyear's new multi-million-dollar planned expansion.

Minister, Ontarians cannot afford your hydro increases, due to your expensive energy experiments. Will you stand up now and begin to reverse the damage you're inflicting on Ontarians?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: He alluded to the Green Energy Act and the renewables that we're dealing with in terms of experiments. Well, I have a quote here, and it's from the critic from Nipissing—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: He was alluding to the 15% increase.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nipissing.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: "Taking advantage of locally available green power resources is a good fit with the long-range development strategy we have for the community. I am particularly pleased with the relationship we have struck with West Wind Development Inc. for the first half of the project. I am confident that the company's reputation as a responsible wind power developer"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader is warned, and the member from Nipissing will come to order—second time.

Carry on.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: —the member from Nipissing says, will "put North Bay 'on the map' as a showcase for the sensitive and responsible development of this great renewable energy source."

He is a great endorser—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Too bad you didn't warn us about the cost.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. You're finished.

The member from Nipissing is warned.

New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Deputy Premier. The budget act says this in section 7 of schedule 9: "If, at any time ... the number of common shares of Hydro One ... owned by the minister ... ceases to be greater than 10% of the outstanding common shares of Hydro One ... from that time ... share ownership restrictions ... apply to the minister...."

1130

Speaker, the Premier is promising that the province will own 40% of Hydro One, so why is she making plans for Ontario to hold less than 10% of Hydro One?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I can assure the people of this province, Speaker, that the government will hold a minimum of 40% of the shares. The next—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will come to order; that's the second time. The member from Essex, come to order; that's the second time.

Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we are introducing legislation that would mean the government cannot own less than 40% of Hydro One shares. No other shareholder would be allowed to own more than 10%. Key decisions require a two-thirds vote, and we will own a minimum of 40%. We will retain that important control. All of Hydro One's officers would be required to reside in Ontario, head office—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, it's clear the Deputy Premier needs a briefing from her finance officials.

The Premier keeps insisting that she's only going to sell 60% of Hydro One, but yesterday we learned there is nothing to prevent the public ownership from getting diluted far beyond 40%.

When the Premier first won her seat, the Ontario Liberals were committed to keeping hydro in public hands. Now she's planning to sell 60%. What's to stop her from selling 70%, 80%, 90% or even more?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Speaker, it is critical for us to put in legislation the parameters by which to protect the public interest. We have said all along that Ontarians will have at least 40% ownership of Hydro One.

But the point being made here is the fact that Hydro One may become a growth company. In fact, we hope it will be, so we can access even greater dividends for the benefit of the public, and in so doing, we have to protect the interests of the public by ensuring that we always retain that 40%.

We will work collaboratively to ensure that no one or group of shareholders can have more than 10% ownership of Hydro One, and we will continue to do that. Legislation will be required to enforce that. We'll work together with all members of this House, who should be supportive of this for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to have this opportunity to put a question to the Associate Minister of Finance.

I know that retirement security is top of mind for many Ontarians all across the province. Certainly my constituents in Beaches–East York, particularly those in their twenties and thirties, are particularly concerned that they do not have access to a workplace pension plan, and they are concerned about their future. They are concerned that they will not be able to maintain a reasonable

standard of living during their retirement. In fact, many have even told me they're concerned that they will never have the luxury of being able to retire.

That's why they are all thrilled now to see that our government is moving ahead with the creation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Just last week, I was pleased to see that the budget outlined important progress that we were making toward implementing that plan.

Speaker, through you, will the minister please provide us with details about the steps the government is taking to move forward with the implementation of the important plan?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Beaches–East York for that very important question.

Mr. Speaker, last week's budget announced an important next step for our government in taking the enhancement of the retirement security of millions of Ontarians and moving that forward. Our government is introducing legislation to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Administration Corp. This entity will be responsible for administering the ORPP. It will be a professional, independent pension organization.

Ontario is a global leader in pension administration and management. The pension plans such as teachers' and HOOPP are recognized as top performers internationally. The Economist called Ontario plans "maple revolutionaries."

Mr. Speaker, we're leveraging the skill and the expertise of Ontario's considerable pension experts as we move forward with implementing the ORPP.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you to the minister for that very intelligent response. I know constituents in my riding will be glad to hear that our government is moving forward with setting up the body to administer this important pension plan.

The businesses in my riding have emphasized the importance of creating an administrative structure that is simple, efficient and effective. I'm very glad to see that our government is doing just that. I'm also pleased to learn that our government is able to capitalize on the skills and expertise of pension experts right here in the province of Ontario. I'll admit that I didn't know that Canadian pension funds, particularly those from Ontario, were held in such high regard on the international stage.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Hong Kong.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Particularly in Hong Kong. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, again, through you to the Associate Minister of Finance, would you please outline to the members of this House the reasons why our pension funds have been so successful and how the government is drawing on this expertise?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member for this very important question. I know how hard he's working on behalf of his constituents.

Experts have attributed the success of these plans to several important features. These plans have strong and

independent governance structures. They have the ability to attract the right talent with investment and pension administrative expertise, and they have the scale necessary to achieve high performance in a low-cost, efficient way.

The New York Times recently stated that “lower management costs, freedom from political meddling and non-existent funding shortfalls ... is a model that has moved the major Canadian pension plans largely out of government debt in search of higher returns.”

We’re also working with pension experts on our technical advisory panel to incorporate these key attributes into the design of the administrative corporation. Leveraging this expertise will enable us to create the best possible benefits for the people of Ontario.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, the Fraser Institute Annual Survey of Mining Companies suggests that Ontario is heading in the wrong direction. In the investment attractiveness index, Ontario fell nine places to 23rd in the world. The report pointed to “complete incomprehensibility” and “impractical regulation,” among other issues in the changes to the Ontario Mining Act.

Minister, can you explain why Ontario fell nine spots in a single year in the Fraser Institute’s survey of mining companies under your watch?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Certainly we’re interested in the survey done by the Fraser Institute, as we are by everyone else that is watching the mining industry so closely. But the important good news, and the news that we need to be talking about, is the fact that Ontario continues to be the top jurisdiction for exploration in the entire country. Ontario continues to be the top jurisdiction, in terms of mineral production—over \$11 billion in 2014, \$5.7 billion about 10 years ago; that has gone up—and in terms of exploration, over \$500 million.

We are continuing to move forward with the opening up of new mines all across the province. I think the member knows well about the Phoenix Gold project that Rubicon, in terms of the Red Lake area—the expansion of the Goldcorp facility in Cochenour, and the new gold opportunity we’re seeing in Fort Frances. The long and short of it is, there’s great news going forward in the mining sector, and we’re very excited about it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, the Fraser report is an important measure of confidence in our province—and it’s heading in the wrong direction.

The Fraser Institute isn’t the only organization that has taken notice of your government’s track record on the mining file. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce points to permitting delays in the report on the Ring of Fire. Under the Environmental Assessment Act, EA terms of reference are to be approved or rejected within 12 weeks of submission.

Those terms of reference for Noront’s Eagle’s Nest mine were submitted over two years ago and have still not been ruled on. That’s 133 weeks and counting. Minis-

ter, how can you justify such a delay on a project that is worth over \$60 billion and will create thousands of jobs in northern Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I think the member knows well about the exciting opportunities that we have in the Ring of Fire, and certainly one of them is the Noront project, the Eagle’s Nest project. I think, may I say, if the member was speaking to the CEO of Noront Resources, he would be speaking very positively about the very close relationship we have and the work that we are doing together to help advance that project. That project also includes the opportunity we have to work so closely with our First Nations, to make sure that they see benefits to this project as well.

But you’re quite right. The real evidence that we see on the ground are the mining companies themselves.

Yesterday, myself and a number of my colleagues, including the Treasury Board president, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, spent a great deal of time with key mining executives all across the province. We had a very special day when we talked about those great opportunities, moving forward and the work that we’re going to continue to do to see the mining opportunities in the province continue to develop, creating jobs all across the province.

1140

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Acting Premier. Two weeks ago, I warned that the Pan Am Games in Hamilton could be at risk. Yesterday, the city of Hamilton said the same. But this government isn’t listening again.

Well, the mayor of Hamilton has now sent the Premier a letter demanding answers: “Key elements of the Hamilton Stadium will not have arrived onsite and be installed until the end of June ... the city’s ability to host the Pan Am Games soccer matches at the new stadium also is in jeopardy.”

The Hamilton stadium was meant to be ready last June. Every week since then has brought another excuse, another reassurance and another empty promise.

Can you personally promise the House that the stadium will be ready? What will you do if it isn’t? And who will the Premier hold accountable for this utter fiasco?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the minister responsible for the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I’d like to thank the member for the question. There are 73 more days to go until we welcome the world to Ontario for the largest multi-sport event in the history of this province.

When it comes to our infrastructure, we’re in great shape. We’re \$55.5 million under budget when it comes to our infrastructure. When it comes to corporate Canada, we’ve been able to raise \$170 million from corporate sponsorship. We have 60,000 people who have offered to help, and the highest per capita coming from Hamilton.

In fact, when it comes to Hamilton, the flame cauldron that is going to be used will be using Hamilton steel.

The soccer matches that are going to be held in Hamilton are one of our best-sold tickets. We've been able to sell 350,000 tickets so far.

The people of Hamilton are on board, the people of Ontario are on board, and we're quite—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Even though he didn't answer the question, I guess the mayor of Hamilton disagrees with you: "The continued public communication of the May 8th substantial completion date creates false expectations ... after ONSS delivers a substantially completed stadium, the sponsors need to complete additional construction work and training in advance of any events taking place" in Hamilton.

We have also learned that they've somehow managed to build 700 seats without a view of the field—a fitting monument to this government's blindness and management.

Yesterday, three reporters tried to get answers from the contractor and from Infrastructure Ontario, an agency of this government, about the delays. They were told that any facts on the delays were commercial issues and confidential. The refusal of a public agency to answer these questions is simply outrageous.

Deputy Premier, since Infrastructure Ontario won't give a straight answer to the people of Ontario, will you give us one today?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I think the member opposite needs to check in with his city hall, because the city of Hamilton issued an occupancy permit for the stadium on April 16. I'm quite proud of the fact that we're able to move forward, and this is one of the best milestones we've reached in the Hamilton stadium. So thank you very much for the question and thank you to the member for providing me with an opportunity to—

Mr. Paul Miller: Utter baloney.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek is warned.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And whoever was starting that will get one too.

One wrap-up.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The simple fact is, this is the largest investment in sport infrastructure in the history of this province, and we are proud of our record.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. Grant Crack: My question this morning is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. I am particularly proud of our government's recently announced 2015 budget. We have continued to deliver on our commitment to follow our path to balance, while continuing to invest in what's important to Ontarians.

In the 2014 budget, we introduced the province's economic plan. Now, in the 2015 budget, we have demon-

strated the significant progress that has been made on that plan to date. Job creation and economic development is a key part of our plan of building Ontario up. This includes our province's largest cities, our province's small and rural communities such as Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, and our province's northern regions.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, can the minister please explain how this year's budgeted investments will ensure a robust northern economy in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks to the member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell for that great question. Just this past week I attended the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association along with my colleagues, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and my parliamentary assistant. We spoke about the incredible investments in this year's budget that are obviously having a great impact in the north.

It's not hard to find examples. First of all, and this is huge, we've committed to a permanent Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program with continued investment up to \$120 million per year to assist with the unique challenges facing major resource-based industries in the north, and that is huge.

We're investing in roads, highways and bridges, with about \$15 billion in the Moving Ontario Forward plan for projects like the four-laning between Thunder Bay and Nipigon, the four-laning of Highway 69 and many other important projects in northern Ontario that we're excited about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: I'd like to thank the Minister of Northern Development and Mines for that answer.

Our government believes that when we invest, we grow; and when we build, we grow. This approach significantly contrasts with the recent federal budget that once again shortchanges Ontarians.

Our government is supporting a dynamic and innovative business climate across this province, but the federal government is certainly not investing to the extent that Ontarians expect and need, particularly in small, rural and northern communities.

Speaker, through you, will the minister please explain how we plan to move forward on some of our province's largest economic opportunities, like the amazing Ring of Fire project, in the absence of federal leadership?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: The Ring of Fire indeed is an extraordinary economic development opportunity. I'm very excited about the fact that we have recommitted our one billion in provincial infrastructure dollars. What is alarming is that indeed there's still no support from the federal government coming forward.

In the federal budget last week, two days before our budget, there was no mention of any infrastructure funding for the Ring of Fire. May I say, when northern members of the Harper government say—I will quote one of the members—that the Ring of Fire is "not a priority for the government because it is not a priority for the private sector," boy do they have it wrong. We heard examples of that even in the House today.

The private sector and First Nations need to know that the federal government will be an active partner and is committed to moving forward with the promise of realizing this—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Michael Gravelle:—sustainable development of this great, exciting economic development—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe North.

Hon. Michael Gravelle:—for all of Canada.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Acting Premier. Ontario can't afford your pension scheme. Your plan to reach into the pockets of Ontario employed people to remove 1.9% is in fact a job-killer plan. Your own ministry officials predict your plan will kill jobs.

Why do you continue to ignore the evidence provided by experts in the ministry, the CFIB, all the chambers of commerce and others?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Associate Minister of Finance responsible for the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member for this question. I think the member knows full well that the numbers she's referring to have nothing to do with this plan whatsoever. It is referring to a study that was done regarding transit and revenue tools that was rejected by our government.

In fact, when we look at what economists are saying about the impact of pension plans and a supplemental plan like the ORPP on Ontario's economy, they're saying that it is actually good for Ontario's economy.

David Dodge has said that in fact when we look at the long-term structural impact of the supplemental plan, it will actually advance Ontario's economy in key ways. It will boost productivity. It would boost investments in our economy, in companies. It will also—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Back to the Acting Premier: Not only does your pension scheme pick the pockets of the employed, it snatches another 1.9% from all the Businesses. Businesses pay taxes and create jobs, but only when they make a profit. You are destroying that balance. Why are you making Ontario uncompetitive? Why are you driving business away from Ontario?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: The member opposite is simply wrong. In fact, just this morning I was with a number of businesses from across the GTHA at the CivicAction boot camp. In fact, if we do not invest in the future of this province, that is going to be hurtful to businesses.

When we look at pension coverage in this province, it is incredibly low, but when we look at the next generation of retirees, those future retirees, we have to be concerned. Some 75% of workers between the ages of 25 and 34 have no workplace-based pension plan. We have to take action today to ensure that when they retire, they

can retire with security, and that they can continue to consume and participate in Ontario's economy. That's good for business, that's good for people and that's good for Ontario's economy.

What we are doing—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

HOME CARE

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, as you know, in Niagara the in-home care nurses in Niagara have been on strike for a number of weeks. Their employer, the private company CarePartners, has not bargained their first agreement, and no one has been able to settle this at the bargaining table.

The owner of CarePartners is earning several hundred thousand dollars per year of taxpayers' money.

I met with patients over the weekend who told me their gut-wrenching stories about the lack of care they're now receiving.

Mr. Speaker, as minister responsible for providing health care in this province, can he explain to me why CarePartners is still receiving referrals from the local CCAC?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the member opposite raising this. We had an opportunity to speak yesterday about this issue. I know we do agree that patients in this province want to and they deserve to receive the highest quality of care in their homes, in their community, and at an appropriate venue.

There is a dispute between an employer and the employees, as the member opposite has referenced. As the minister—as a government, we encourage both parties to get back to the negotiating table.

The CCAC that's responsible, as they should be, for providing that quality of care is not the employer in this case. It is not involved in these negotiations.

I also understand that Ministry of Labour mediators are available to both parties should they so desire. I would encourage both parties to get back to the negotiating table. I expect our CCACs to ensure that that quality of care is provided to all clients within that catchment area.

DEFERRED VOTES

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AMENDMENT ACT, 2015 LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SOCIÉTÉ DE PROTECTION DES ANIMAUX DE L'ONTARIO

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 80, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animals for Research Act with respect to the possession and breeding of orcas and administrative requirements for animal care / Projet de loi 80, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario et la Loi sur les animaux destinés à la recherche en ce qui concerne la possession et l'élevage d'épaulards ainsi que les exigences administratives relatives aux soins dispensés aux animaux.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1154 to 1159.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would all members please take their seats? All members take their seats, please.

On March 31, 2015, Mr. Naqvi moved second reading of Bill 80. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Hatfield, Percy	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Hoggarth, Ann	Miller, Paul
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Horwath, Andrea	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Naqvi, Yasir
Ballard, Chris	Hunter, Mitzie	Natyshak, Taras
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Oraziotti, David
Bisson, Gilles	Kiwala, Sophie	Potts, Arthur
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chiarelli, Bob	Lalonde, Marie-France	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Crack, Grant	Malhi, Harinder	Sousa, Charles
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Tabuns, Peter
Del Duca, Steven	Mantha, Michael	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Martins, Cristina	Thibeault, Glenn
Dong, Han	Matthews, Deborah	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Mauro, Bill	Vernile, Daiene
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McGarry, Kathryn	Wong, Soo
Fraser, John	McMahon, Eleanor	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gravelle, Michael	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David
Gretzky, Lisa	Meilleur, Madeleine	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Smith, Todd
Barrett, Toby	MacLeod, Lisa	Thompson, Lisa M.
Clark, Steve	Martow, Gila	Walker, Bill
Dunlop, Garfield	McDonnell, Jim	Wilson, Jim
Fedeli, Victor	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff
Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick	
Hudak, Tim	Scott, Laurie	

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 62; the nays are 22.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 22, 2015, the bill is ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: During proceedings, two constituents of mine came into the House: Alec Tuck and his wonderful mother, Ann Marie Brown. I just wanted to welcome them to the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, the member from Algoma–Manitowlin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Today being April 28, the Day of Mourning, it's also my son's birthday at home. He's in a classroom right now. I want to wish him a very happy birthday: Roch Mantha.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no further deferred votes. This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1203 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Han Dong: I think I have a few guests here from my local university, OCAD. They're here in the House somewhere so I just want to welcome them. I'll make a statement later on about them too.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Bill Walker: April 26 marked the beginning of National Immunization Awareness Week in Canada and I wanted to take a moment to bring attention to this important event. Immunization has been heralded as one of the greatest achievements in public health of the 20th century. It has resulted in the control, eradication or near elimination of numerous infectious diseases and saved more Canadian lives over the past 50 years than any other health intervention. Yet, despite these tremendous scientific advances, we are seeing preventable illnesses making the news in record numbers.

As a society we have taken for granted the impact vaccines have had on our daily lives. Because we are not witnessing first-hand the effects of these diseases, we have forgotten their debilitating and sometimes lethal impact. We have forgotten what the pain and suffering looks like and that is because, when immunization programs work well, we forget that they are working at all.

Vaccines are designed to protect the young, the old, the vulnerable and everyone in between. And in an age when health care centres on acute and chronic treatment, immunization allows us to flip the paradigm, protecting people before they become patients.

Thanks to vaccines, it is almost unheard of that a child will die in Canada of smallpox, diphtheria or bacterial meningitis. Thanks to vaccines, our hospitals no longer

need to treat the devastating effects of polio with iron lungs. Thanks to vaccines, we can protect our seniors against shingles and pneumonia. It is one of the best health measures that you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones from disease and illness, and a cost-effective public health measure that reduces the burden on Ontario's health system through fewer hospital admissions and reduced medical care expenses.

During National Immunization Awareness Week I ask of you, instead of forgetting the past, let's remember it and work towards improving our future. As such, I respectfully remind all members of the House to keep up to date with their immunizations.

AN INSTRUMENT FOR EVERY CHILD

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise today to recognize An Instrument for Every Child, an outstanding cultural initiative that enriches the children of my home city of Hamilton.

The Hamilton Music Collective is a charitable organization formed in 2008 by local educators, business owners and performers who share an interest in music, their community and, in particular, our youth and children. It launched An Instrument for Every Child in 2009 in collaboration with the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra and the Hamilton–Wentworth District School Board.

The program provides elementary school children in Hamilton's inner-city schools and challenged neighbourhoods with the opportunity to learn to play an instrument, participate in musical groups and receive free musical instruction on a weekly basis. It serves children who demonstrate a desire to learn music and inspires children at risk to realize their full potential as students, musicians and citizens.

Since its inception, the program has received tremendous support from within the Hamilton community as well as on a regional level. It could be a model for other communities on how to bring music education into inner-city schools and community centres by maximizing partnerships between local organizations, school boards, Boys and Girls Clubs and local businesses.

I have asked members of the cabinet to study provincial support for An Instrument for Every Child in order to ensure its future sustainability and the continued enrichment of the lives of our children.

To all of the participants and volunteers in this program, thank you for the wonderful work you do.

BURLINGTON TEEN TOUR BAND

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm pleased to rise in this House today to tell you about the pride of Burlington, our Teen Tour Band, Canada's oldest and largest youth marching band. From its beginnings in 1947, when 75 girls and boys gave their first performance, the Burlington Teen Tour Band has since travelled the world representing Canada and racking up an impressive number of awards along the way.

The band has performed for heads of state and royalty as well as on television, in movies and at prestigious events such as the Rose Bowl parade and the 70th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, to name a few.

Just recently, on April 12, I had the privilege of watching the band perform in Burlington to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by Canadian Forces, and the 10th anniversary of the twinning of the city of Burlington and the city of Apeldoorn.

From May 1 to 12, the Teen Tour Band will tour the Netherlands representing Canadian youth to commemorate the liberation anniversary. Highlights include the Thank You Canadian Veterans parade in Wageningen, where the Dutch royal family will be in attendance; an evening concert for the opening of the Burlington Park in Apeldoorn; a veterans' parade in Apeldoorn; and a concert with the Royal Dutch Air Force Band. The Teen Tour Band members will also have the opportunity to speak with Dutch high school students who are caretakers of Canadian war graves, and they will meet with adults who were teenagers themselves at the time of liberation.

I would like to congratulate the Teen Tour Band and their boosters, parents and supporters who work tirelessly to support them, and wish them all the very best for their upcoming trip to the Netherlands.

GODERICH TO GUELPH RAIL TRAIL

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to share with the House some good news coming out of my riding of Huron–Bruce. This July, after 25 years of hard work and community planning, the Goderich to Guelph Rail Trail will be officially opening. The Goderich to Guelph Rail Trail, otherwise known as the G2G Rail Trail, runs along the former CPR railway on land that stretches over 127 kilometres between Guelph and Goderich.

The G2G Rail Trail project was formed by volunteers and an advisory committee that stepped up about five years ago to make it happen. They took plans that were drafted over 25 years ago to work together to complete the G2G.

There is huge support around the community for this project. A number of steward groups and stakeholder groups throughout my riding, and the 13 communities along the trail, have been an asset to its completion.

The group is calling this project an iconic integration between rural and urban Ontario, and it has also been referred to as "the backbone of Ontario trails." The entire stretch is approximately 137 kilometres and will preserve a green space of about five square kilometres, which is actually larger, Speaker, than downtown Toronto.

I would like to close by thanking all the volunteers who made this trail happen after 25 years. The G2G may be the backbone of Ontario trails, but it's these volunteers who are the backbone of our communities. Projects like this would never happen without them.

The G2G Rail Trail is an incredible community project, and I can't wait to see what else they have in store.

ONTARIO WOOD

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the members of this House, most of you will know that there's been a lot of sawmills and paper mills and others that have closed down across northern Ontario over the last number of years. But the thing that is really starting to frustrate people to the largest degree is when you see a mill like what we saw in Iroquois Falls and Smooth Rock Falls close its doors—but what you now see is truckload after truckload after truckload of wood cut in Ontario forests, both poplar and conifer, and transferring it into the province of Quebec for processing.

It is a very bad policy. Our policy should be that wood that is cut in Ontario should be processed through Ontario mills. If there need to be wood exchanges—because those have existed for many years, where mills across the border exchange fibre, because there are some fibre exchanges that do make some sense, but they're essentially equal when it comes to the amount of wood being used—that is not a bad thing, and nobody will stand in the way of it.

But imagine how the community feels in Iroquois Falls and in Cochrane where they've seen their mills go down, and there's between 600 to 1,000 loads of poplar and conifer that are being shipped out to the province of Quebec from those particular forests at the same time that we have mills like Little John Enterprises, which is trying to get certainty on wood when it comes to poplar so that he can operate his mill. Imagine how they feel when they see the wood that could be feeding their mill being transferred over to Quebec and not given an opportunity to add value here in the province of Ontario.

I call on the government to stop this practice.

OCAD UNIVERSITY

Mr. Han Dong: I rise today to recognize and to congratulate OCAD University on their 100th annual Graduate Exhibition, which runs from April 29 to May 3 of this year. Over the five-day exhibit, approximately 25,000 guests will view the final thesis work of more than 900 promising young artists and designers.

The university, which was founded in 1876, boasts a beautiful, well-organized, inspiring campus that continues to attract the best talent from across Ontario and Canada. It makes me very proud every time I walk by Grange Park and look up at the Sharp Centre for Design.

1510

OCAD has a long-standing reputation as a premier destination for arts and design students in Ontario. We are very fortunate to house it and its talented staff and students in the riding of Trinity-Spadina.

To celebrate this tremendous milestone, I invite all members of this Legislature, as well as all members of my community, to visit this historic exhibit and experience the fantastic work of OCAD University students.

Thank you to the members of OCAD for being in the gallery today, and again, congratulations on your historic 100th annual graduate exhibit.

HOCKEY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to seek unanimous consent to use a prop.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The member from Nepean-Carleton is seeking unanimous consent to use a prop during her statement. Do we agree? Agreed.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm being publicly shamed today because my wonderful Ottawa Senators lost to the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday. As a result, I made a commitment to my dear friend Jean Roussele, who is a member of the National Assembly in Quebec, to wear a Montreal Canadiens sweater in the Legislature and deliver a statement, if they lost.

Now, this being Toronto, where they aspire to have an NHL team, they do not actually have any NHL jerseys in this city—either for the Senators or Montreal Canadiens—so it is up to my dear friend the House leader for the government to initial this beautiful, handwritten prop. Of course, I would also like to say thank you to the traitorous member from Timiskaming-Cochrane, who also thinks it was okay because he is a Montreal Canadiens fan.

That said, this place has many heavy moments, but today I think we can all get behind a Canadian team and encourage them to win the Stanley Cup. If my Ottawa Senators can't do it, then, go, Habs, go!

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This past weekend, in my community, I was happy to support the fourth annual Transplant Trot, a fundraising event for the Canadian Transplant Association. On Saturday morning, at Waterloo Park, supporters of organ and tissue donations gathered for an annual run and walk to raise funds and awareness. Similar runs were planned in 10 other cities across Canada.

Currently in Ontario, there are more than 1,500 people who are waiting for organ and tissue transplants so that they may have a second chance at life. Although there are 11.8 million of us in this province who are eligible, only 3.1 million have bothered to register—that's 26% of our population. I think that we can do better.

I met a number of people whose lives have been changed and saved by organ donations. Recipients of heart, lung, kidney and liver transplants are thriving today because others have generously given this gift of continued life.

I also met Julie from the town of Conestogo. Four years ago while she was driving with her 11-year-old daughter in their car, they were hit by a drunk driver. Although Julie survived, her daughter did not. Julie made the decision to donate her child's organs.

Julie and the other people at Saturday's event encourage all of us to register as organ donors. It's as easy as going to beadonor.ca. What only takes a few minutes of your time could mean years of life for a person in need.

ROTARY YOUTH AWARDS
 PRIX RECONNAISSANCE
 JEUNESSE DU CLUB ROTARY

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: On April 19, I was pleased to be part of the Rotary youth awards in my community of Orléans. As a Rotarian, and an MPP, it was an absolute pleasure to be in the company of 27 dedicated and talented young people.

Ces jeunes, âgés entre 14 et 29 ans, ont été honorés pour leur engagement communautaire, leur entrepreneuriat, leur talent musical et leur succès académique.

The recipients were nominated by their peers, teachers, mentors and other community members not only for their dedication and passion, but for also embodying the Rotary Four-Way Test, which has to do with trust, fairness, goodwill and their actions being beneficial for all.

I was blown away by how much each of these young people has accomplished or overcome in order to be valuable members of their school and larger communities, like spending countless hours practising dance, singing, acting and playing instruments; volunteering their time to local charities; fundraising an impressive amount for international causes; or taking the time to mentor others to be successful as well.

Félicitations à ces incroyables jeunes.

Their commitment and dedication are impressive and will get them very far.

Ils montrent le chemin à la jeunesse ontarienne.

Our future is in good hands.

Lastly, I would like to thank past president Len Goddard, newly elected president Teresa Whitmore, and other Rotarians who organized this wonderful event.

Merci.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Merci. I thank all members for their statements.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

EMPOWERING HOME
 CARE PATIENTS ACT, 2015
 LOI DE 2015 DONNANT PLUS
 DE POUVOIR AUX PERSONNES
 RECEVANT DES SOINS À DOMICILE

Mrs. Gretzky moved first reading of the following bill:
 Bill 92, An Act to amend the Home Care and Community Services Act, 1994 with respect to complaints and appeals / Projet de loi 92, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1994 sur les services de soins à domicile et les services communautaires en ce qui concerne les plaintes et les appels.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Under section 39 of the Home Care and Community Services Act, 1994, an approved agency is required to establish a process for reviewing complaints about specified matters.

The bill shortens the time period from 60 days to 30 days during which an agency is required to respond to complaints respecting decisions about the particular community services a person is entitled to receive. The bill requires the agency's response to include information about the process for appealing the decision to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board.

The bill also provides that if the decision of the agency would have the effect of terminating or reducing the community services provided to a person, an appeal to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board stays the decision.

MOTIONS

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is requesting permission to put forward a motion—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Agreed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

I've got to get it out first.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Anything you ask, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thought so.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be authorized to attend the annual conference of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees, and the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to attend the annual meeting of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be authorized to attend the annual conference of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees, and the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to attend the annual meeting of the National Conference of State Legislatures. Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FIRST RESPONDERS

PREMIERS INTERVENANTS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: First responders provide emergency and often life-saving services in times of crisis. Every day, our first responders put their lives on the line to protect us, our friends, our families, neighbours, communities and, of course, loved ones. They are there when we need them most and look after us in our time of need.

We are always confident that Ontario's first responders are ready at a moment's notice to protect our homes, businesses and our communities. To recognize their ongoing commitment to community safety, the Ontario Legislature proclaimed May 1 of each year as First Responders Day.

It is my great privilege to rise in this House today to recognize and express our gratitude, on behalf of our Premier, our government and the people of Ontario, to our first responders.

1520

Afin de reconnaître leur contribution à la sécurité des collectivités, la législature ontarienne a proclamé le 1^{er} mai jour des premiers répondants. Il s'agit d'un grand privilège pour moi de m'adresser à cette Chambre et d'exprimer notre gratitude, ainsi que celle de la première ministre, de notre gouvernement et de la population ontarienne, envers les premiers répondants.

This includes police officers, firefighters, military personnel, paramedics, medical evacuation pilots, dispatchers, nurses, doctors and emergency managers. It also includes the many volunteers and professionals who dedicate their careers to the service of others.

Emergency service providers are important members of our communities. They are also our neighbours, relatives and friends. Whether they are on the other end of the line when someone calls 911, help a heart attack victim or put their life on the line in defence of our country, these men and women bring professionalism, calm, and a helping hand in the greatest hour of need. Answering the call to keep the rest of us safe is not just something they do; it is a reflection of who they are.

I think it is also extremely important to recognize the correctional staff both inside and outside our institutions who play a key role in keeping our communities safe.

Il est très important aussi de reconnaître la contribution du personnel de nos institutions correctionnelles, à l'interne ou à l'externe, qui contribuent eux aussi à la sécurité de nos collectivités.

Ontario's correctional officers, institution staff and supervisors, nurses, doctors, mental health workers, probation and parole officers, and all the other dedicated professionals work every day to uphold public safety and keep our communities safe.

Emergency service providers help people in times of crisis, but we also want to recognize their volunteer

work, which helps strengthen our communities. From charity events, toy drives, community car washes and coaching little league, our first responders are a positive example for our youth and to everyone in our communities.

We know that Ontario families and communities are safer thanks to the dedication of our first responders, who are there to help us when we need them most.

I also want to recognize the sacrifice of their families, their partners, their mothers and fathers and their children. Thank you for sharing your loved ones with us.

Speaker, we must take the opportunity to pay our respects to those who have lost their lives in service to our communities. Working with firefighters and police, we created an annual tribute to honour those who have died in the line of duty. This weekend, the Ontario Police Memorial Foundation will hold its annual ceremony of remembrance at Queen's Park in Toronto. The names of fallen officers are inscribed on the wall of honour. Let's all take a moment to reflect on their courage, dedication and sacrifice.

Heroes are defined by the way they live their lives in service to their communities and in protecting those in harm's way. To the families of those who have given their lives to protect others, we owe you an eternal debt and we keep the memory of your loved ones in our hearts and minds so that they may never be forgotten.

Ontarians are privileged to be protected by our first responders. We are grateful for their dedication, their public service and their commitment to duty and service.

Nous devons une gratitude éternelle aux familles de ceux et celles qui ont sacrifié leur vie pour protéger les autres. Nous gardons la mémoire de vos proches toujours gravée dans nos cœurs et nos pensées. Ils ne seront jamais oubliés.

Les Ontariens sont privilégiés d'être sous la protection de nos premiers répondants. Nous exprimons un grand sens de gratitude envers leur détermination, pour les services qu'ils rendent au public et pour leur engagement à remplir leurs devoirs et leurs fonctions.

Thank you. Merci.

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: April 28 is observed across Canada as the day of mourning. It's a day when we pay our respects to and we remember the men and women who have been killed or injured on the job. We also honour the families and friends whose lives have been drastically changed by these tragedies.

This date was picked because on April 28, 1914, the Workmen's Compensation Act was given third reading right in this very Legislature.

Ontario has been recognizing the day of mourning since the 1980s. Now the day of mourning is recognized in more than 100 countries right around the globe.

Here at home, health and safety advocates in our businesses, schools and communities work hard each and every day to ensure healthy and very safe workplaces for our people.

The good news today is that thanks to the efforts of all those people, we've significantly lowered the number of workplace injuries in the province of Ontario. In fact, in the past decade we've reduced injuries by 40%, making Ontario one of the safest places to work in all of Canada.

Despite this progress, too many people, though, continue to lose their lives, or to suffer an injury or an illness, simply as a result of going to work. No job is worth a life; no job is worth an illness or an injury.

While it is very important to track the numbers that will help us ensure our plans are working, there is, of course, a very real and a very human dimension to all of this. When workplace tragedies happen, lives are devastated. Families, co-workers, indeed whole communities, feel the impact, and it's a painful impact. So I take this role very seriously; I know this House takes this issue very seriously as well.

I'm urging each and every member from all three parties in the House today to make workplace health and safety a personal priority. I ask you to spread the word in your own communities that workers have the right to refuse unsafe work, that there are resources available through the Ministry of Labour so employers and workers understand their rights and they understand their responsibilities.

I'm proud to be part of a government that's actively investing in workplace health and safety. At my ministry, we're working hard with our partners to continue to bring the injury numbers down and to eliminate these deaths. We've almost doubled the number of workplace health and safety inspectors in Ontario.

Earlier this month we took action to prevent falls in the construction industry by making new working at heights training mandatory in the province.

We were just recently in Sudbury to announce that the government is accepting and acting on each and every one of the 18 recommendations from the Mining Health, Safety and Prevention Review that was recently undertaken.

We're continuing to conduct inspection blitzes every year to raise safety awareness and to help prevent injuries and fatalities.

But Speaker, I know as much as you do, much more must be done. We must continue to strive to make a difference on this issue for our workers. We need to ensure every workplace has the tools it needs to improve workplace health and safety, and that every worker in the province has the information and the support they need to make choices in the workplace.

Let us all honour those we remember today by rededicating ourselves to doing whatever it takes to prevent workplace fatalities, injuries and illnesses. Let's continue to work hard to change the culture around workplace health and safety.

Let's remember all those who have been killed or injured at work. Let's keep them in our thoughts so we never forget the importance of our commitment to keep workers safe.

Those who have died, been injured or become ill on the job deserve our respect and remembrance. We should

honour the memory of our fallen by pledging to do what we can to make Ontario workplaces as safe as possible for all our working men, women, and their families.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my great privilege to rise in the House today on behalf of my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative caucus to express our sincere thanks to the province's first responders.

First responders come in many forms. They include police officers, firefighters, military personnel, paramedics, medical evacuation pilots, dispatchers, nurses, doctors, emergency medical technicians and emergency managers. They are the heroes we call in our times of greatest need. Our first responders are there to answer that call and they never waver.

My former colleague, Frank Klees, the former member from Newmarket–Aurora, deeply believed that public service performed by these men and women deserved to be recognized, honoured and cherished. That's why he fought tirelessly to make May 1 First Responders Day, as a lasting testament to their brave service and sacrifice.

1530

Speaker, I developed a deeper appreciation for our first responders on Friday, September 3, 1999. While driving to work in Windsor on the 401, a thick blanket of fog appeared without warning in the vicinity of Manning Road, leading to the largest vehicle pile-up in Ontario's history. I recall getting out of my car, rescuing a pregnant woman in the median, getting her to safety and then going back to my vehicle and calling the Chatham radio station to report the accident that was unfolding. In the end, some were able to pull over to safety, but many were not so lucky. I can still hear the vehicles in both the eastbound and westbound lanes slamming into each other. It was like I was in a war zone. All told, more than 40 people were injured and, tragically, eight people lost their lives.

But our first responders were the calm amongst the chaos, compassionate in the face of carnage. To this day, I remember their unfaltering courage. I also remember the sights and sounds of that foggy morning, and can only begin to imagine the toll such service takes on our first responders. Many of them, I'm sure, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder afterwards.

To each and every one of our first responders in our great province, thank you for all that you have done and thank you for what you continue to do. If there ever comes a day when these heroes must call on our government for support, may we answer that call and never waver.

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, it's an honour to be speaking in the House this afternoon to the National Day

of Mourning. It was also an honour to speak at the ceremony this morning, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus.

Today we remember the workers who didn't make it home from their jobs. In this country, when someone leaves for work, we expect that they come home. Tragically, sometimes that is not always the case.

Lots of jobs have inherent risks, such as police work, first responders, heavy equipment operators and construction, and the list goes on and on. Accidents can happen on any work site anywhere and to anyone for many reasons.

Having worked on hundreds of job sites myself over my career as an electrician, I have seen my share of workers injured on the job, from cuts to broken bones to lifelong debilitating injuries and also fatalities.

While it's tragic any time someone is injured on the job, it's important that our focus continues on the principles of prevention and precaution. New technologies, precaution and knowledge of workplace hazards are the keys to preventing as many accidents as possible.

While it's a tragedy anytime someone is hurt while performing their workplace duties, unfortunately accidents do happen. That's why it's important that we focus not only on prevention but also rehabilitation and reintroducing workers back into the workplace.

There needs to be support for workers while their injury prevents them from working. Sometimes these injuries may not make it possible for injured workers to return to their former employment. Sometimes they may not even be able to return to their former careers.

That's why it's important that we strive to support and retrain all workers back into the workforce wherever possible. Our goal must always be to have people always using their talents to provide for themselves and their families and to live a long, happy, prosperous and healthy life.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On First Responders Day, I come with a request from the tens of thousands of first responders across this province—a very simple one, really: that this government make post-traumatic stress disorder a workplace injury for them, so that when they go to WSIB, they can be treated with dignity. They have asked this not once, not twice, not thrice, not four times, not five times—but also passed in second reading in this House for over the last eight years, and, sadly, still no action.

Thirteen suicides happened in the first 13 weeks of this year—first responders all. Why did they happen? Because of the lack of treatment and lack of dignity afforded our first responders.

Much as we love the glowing words from around this chamber, what they would like to see is action. This bill has passed second reading. This has been called for from all first responders, year in and year out—still no action.

In Alberta, they've managed to act, Mr. Speaker. In 2012, they passed a bill making PTSD a workplace injury

for first responders. And guess what? It's working well. It affords their first responders dignity.

I don't know what more to say, and they don't know what more to say—or more to do. They have asked so many times. How many deaths does it take? How many deaths does it take of our first responders?

I well remember eight years ago when a young paramedic came into my office. She suffered from PTSD and she described the horrible battle she had with WSIB, trying to prove that she got PTSD from her job. Not much has changed. Just the other day I had a call from a firefighter—the same thing. He's been trying for years to prove that the PTSD he suffered from came from his workplace as a first responder, and still no response.

I've spoken many times to the Minister of Labour. We've been promised that something is going to happen, still we ask. So on First Responders Day, it's a simple request, a request from tens of thousands of first responders and their associations and unions across Ontario, and that is: Give us the dignity we deserve. We've heard the words, now, please, finally, let's see the action.

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's an honour to rise today on behalf of the New Democrats and Andrea Horwath to commemorate the National Day of Mourning, an NDP initiative that was brought forward in 1991, to honour workers killed on the job.

Speaker, according to WSIB, on-the-job fatalities have increased by almost 40% over the last five years. The grim reality is that in each year more than 80 workers die in traumatic workplace accidents; 300 workers die an even slower death with occupational disease; and 200,000 are maimed or seriously injured. These are only the numbers that are reported. They do not include those who are not reported, those who are temporary foreign workers, those who never make it to the WSIB rolls.

Just last week here in Ontario, William Cerqueira fell three storeys to his death, leaving behind a wife, an 11-year-old son and many LIUNA 506 brothers grieving. Last Tuesday, Mark Attallah, a member of Carpenters 27, was crushed by a crane that collapsed in Brampton. Three weeks ago, bricklayers Luigi Cudini and Shane Jennings of Local 1 died when their working platform buckled and they fell five storeys.

I was honoured today to attend the day of mourning ceremony across from the site of this fall, hosted by the Toronto regional labour council, and the WSIB ceremony as well this morning.

While we mourn for those who have lost their lives, there's much more that needs to be done for the living. For example, the Dean report, a 2010 Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health and Safety endorsed by the Ministry of Labour, has seen little or no progress on any of the 46 recommendations. So as we stand here today, we need to make sure that our commitment is to follow through with action.

On a good note, mandatory working at heights training was finally implemented on April 1 this year, although it

was four years late. Hundreds of workers have been trained to date, I've been told by the Workers Health and Safety Centre, but imagine the lives that could have been saved had it been implemented earlier. We owe it to our most valuable resource in this province, our workers.

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, I want to convey my sincerest condolences to the families of William, Mark, Luigi and Shane, and to the countless more whose loved ones didn't come home at the end of their shift.

PETITIONS

PESTICIDES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to make regulatory changes to the Pesticides Act that will have a considerable negative impact on virtually all of Ontario's corn and soybean farmers;

1540

"Whereas comments on the proposed regulations need to be submitted by May 7, 2015; yet the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs plainly states on their website that '[t]he optimum planting day [for corn] is on or before May 7 in southwestern Ontario and May 10 in central and eastern Ontario. Delaying planting past the optimum date can result in yield reductions averaging about 1% per day of delay in May.';

"Whereas the ministry's website also says: 'The highest yields of soybeans are obtained from early plantings, generally the first 10 days of May. Later plantings are likely to incur significant reductions in yield ...';

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Instruct the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change to extend the comment period on EBR posting number 012-3733 beyond the planting season for corn and soybeans as defined by Agricorp planting deadlines to allow farmers to farm, and be properly consulted on these proposed regulations that will significantly impact their livelihoods."

I totally agree with this petition, I'll affix my signature and send it to the desk with Samantha.

HOME CARE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Erie St. Clair Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) has historically serviced low-mild need patients;

"Whereas this level of service is critical to the Erie St. Clair CCAC home care patients who depend on it;

"Whereas reliable and robust home care is vital to enable seniors, immobile patients and citizens with special needs to live independent and rewarding lives in their own homes;

"Whereas a reduction to any level of service offered by the CCAC causes undue anxiety to home care patients and their families;

"Whereas the 33% reduction of daily home nursing visits and other service reductions announced by the Erie St. Clair CCAC compromise the health and well-being of home care patients and their families;

"Therefore the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To request that the government of Ontario reverse each and every service reduction at the Erie St. Clair CCAC."

I fully agree with this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to Megan to bring up to the desk.

STUDENT SAFETY

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with this petition. I'm going to affix my signature to it, and I will pass it on to Ashton.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, thank you for letting me present this petition on behalf of a great number of my constituents. Again, the petition has been here before, but signed by different people.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and the quality of life for future generations;

"Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which have significant human and financial costs;

"Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents' physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

"Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill in the headwaters of multiple highly vulnerable aquifers is detrimental;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To implement a moratorium in Oxford county, Ontario, on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as a full and comprehensive review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

"That this review of alternatives would give special emphasis on (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can practically and efficiently be recycled or reused so as to not require disposal."

Thank you very much for allowing me to present this petition, Mr. Speaker.

HOME CARE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Erie St. Clair Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) has historically serviced low-mild need patients;

"Whereas this level of service is critical to the Erie St. Clair CCAC home care patients who depend on it;

"Whereas reliable and robust home care is vital to enable seniors, immobile patients and citizens with special needs to live independent and rewarding lives in their own homes;

"Whereas a reduction to any level of service offered by the CCAC causes undue anxiety to home care patients and their families;

"Whereas the 33% reduction of daily home nursing visits and other service reductions announced by the Erie St. Clair CCAC compromise the health and well-being of home care patients and their families;

"Therefore the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To request that the government of Ontario reverse each and every service reduction at the Erie St. Clair CCAC."

I support this petition, will sign my name and give it to page Cailyn.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, this is another petition on the same subject but a slightly different petition, and, again, presented by a great many people who have signed this one.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the purpose of Ontario's Environmental Protection Act ... is to 'provide for the protection and conservation of the natural environment.' RSO 1990, c. E.19, s. 3.; and

"Whereas 'all landfills will eventually release leachate to the surrounding environment and therefore all landfills will have some impact on the water quality of the local

ecosystem.'—Threats to Sources of Drinking Water and Aquatic Health in Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That section 27 of the EPA should be reviewed and amended immediately to prohibit the establishment of new or expanded landfills at fractured bedrock sites and other hydrogeologically unsuitable locations within the province of Ontario."

Again, I affix my signature as I agree with this petition.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's my pleasure to introduce a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Highway 3 from Windsor to Leamington has long been identified as dangerous and unable to meet growing traffic volumes; and

"Whereas the widening of this highway passed its environmental assessment in 2006; and

"Whereas the portion of this project from Windsor to west of the town of Essex has been completed, but the remainder of the project remains stalled; and

"Whereas there has been a recent announcement of plans to rebuild the roadway, culverts, lighting and signals along the portion of Highway 3 that has not been widened;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revisit plans to rebuild Highway 3 from Essex to Leamington and direct those funds to the timely completion of the already approved widening of this important roadway in Essex county."

I completely agree with this petition, have affixed my name to it and will send it to the Clerks' desk through page Chloe.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Mr. Todd Smith: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

"Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

"Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners' Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and to instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types."

I agree with this, sign it and send to the table with Luca.

TAXATION

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government has proposed a 148% increase in the province's aviation fuel tax over the next four years; and

"Whereas the tax increase will mean the average family can pay an estimated extra \$50 to \$200 for the flight on top of their tickets; and

"Whereas the massive tax increase: (1) punishes consumers and communities; (2) makes Ontario a less attractive destination to invest and expand into; and (3) compounds an already large competitiveness gap with neighbouring US airports; and

"Whereas the flight tax increase flies in the face of a Liberal election promise of no tax increases on the middle class; and

"Whereas the proposed tax increase will drive away over 400,000 air travellers out of Ontario when three million Ontarians are already crossing the border annually to fly from US airports; and

"Whereas this tax increase will impact many industries across Ontario including manufacturers, freight and tourism including hotels, restaurants, travel agents and tour operators, among others who support the tourism industry; and

"Whereas according to the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association, the increase will effectively squeeze the personal aviation and flight training sector, decreasing activity and curtailing jobs such as aircraft repair and servicing, and flight training; and

"Whereas British Columbia, New Brunswick, Alberta, Quebec and Saskatchewan have eliminated international flight fuel taxes, while Ontario's rate is set to become one of the highest fuel taxes in the world; and

1550

"Whereas Dr. Fred Lazar of the Schulich School of Business indicates in his study that this tax increase will cost the province up to 2,907 full-time jobs and decrease provincial GDP by up to \$97 million annually;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Ground the flight tax increases pending meaningful consultation and a full study of their adverse economic impacts before it's too late to reverse the damage to Ontario's economy."

I totally agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature and send it back to the desk with Samantha.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John Vanthof: I've got a petition here from Tony Desormeaux from my home township of Coleman.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

"Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

"Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

"Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition."

I wholeheartedly agree and would like to send it down to the desk with page Colton.

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Liberal government has proposed a 148% increase in the province's aviation fuel tax over the next four years; and

"Whereas the tax increase will mean the average family can pay an estimated extra \$50 to \$200 for the flight on top of their tickets; and

"Whereas the massive tax increase: (1) punishes consumers and communities; (2) makes Ontario a less attractive destination to invest and expand into; and (3) compounds an already large competitiveness gap with neighbouring US airports; and

"Whereas the flight tax increase flies in the face of a Liberal election promise of no tax increases on the middle class; and

"Whereas the proposed tax increase will drive away over 400,000 air travellers out of Ontario when three million Ontarians are already crossing the border annually to fly from US airports; and

"Whereas this tax increase will impact many industries across Ontario including manufacturers, freight and tourism including hotels, restaurants, travel agents and tour operators, among others who support the tourism industry; and

"Whereas according to the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association, the increase will effectively squeeze the personal aviation and flight training sector, decreasing activity and curtailing jobs such as aircraft repair and servicing, and flight training; and

"Whereas British Columbia, New Brunswick, Alberta, Quebec and Saskatchewan have eliminated international flight fuel taxes, while Ontario's rate is set to become one of the highest fuel taxes in the world; and

"Whereas Dr. Fred Lazar of the Schulich School of Business indicates in his study that this tax increase will cost the province up to 2,907 full-time jobs and decrease provincial GDP by up to \$97 million annually;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Ground the flight tax increases pending meaningful consultation and a full study of their adverse economic impacts before it's too late to reverse the damage to Ontario's economy."

This was sent to me by Robert McCormick, and I'm glad to present it on his behalf.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario faces an affordable housing crisis; and

"Whereas one in every three renter households lives in housing that is unaffordable, inadequate or in serious need of repair, and more than 165,000 families across Ontario are waiting for rent-geared-to-income housing; and

"Whereas inclusionary zoning laws have helped create affordable housing and alleviated poverty in more than 200 communities across the United States; and

"Whereas research by the Wellesley Institute and the Furman Centre have shown that inclusionary zoning could create thousands of affordable housing units a year in Ontario, without significant impact on the production of market housing, and without any cost to the taxpayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact a law empowering municipalities across the province to pass inclusionary zoning bylaws which mandate that a specified percentage of new residential developments include affordable housing units."

I couldn't agree more. I'm going to sign it and give it to Afyah to be delivered to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2015 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 28, 2015, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'll be sharing my time with the NDP critic for finance.

I'm pleased to respond to the Liberals' 2015 budget, on behalf of Ontario's New Democrats.

Last week, the Premier unveiled the latest in a series of budgets that failed to address the concerns of the people of Ontario. People are looking for a plan that focuses on their priorities: their kids' education, their health care and the care of their loved ones, being able to find a good-paying job, and making life a little more affordable so that people can keep a little more money in their pockets at the end of the month. Instead, we have a

document full of cuts to the services that Ontarians rely on, full of added burdens to the budgets of households, and full of handouts to those who need them the least.

It does nothing to address the loss of more than 317,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector or to help the half million people who are currently out of work in this province. It continues to ignore the priorities of northern Ontario. It proposes the sale of Hydro One, which will mean even higher hydro bills, making it harder for families to make ends meet and for businesses to stay afloat. In short, it leaves middle-class and struggling Ontarians falling behind.

After all the scandals, the misplaced priorities and the bad decisions, it is clear that Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals still do not know right from wrong. Instead of choosing to close tax loopholes for corporations, Kathleen Wynne is making Ontarians pay the price. This budget cuts education and closes schools. It cuts health care and fires nurses. It cuts poverty reduction programs. It sells off our hydro system to Bay Street and opens the door to more privatization in years to come.

Speaker, this isn't just what I think. This isn't just New Democrats. Let's see what other people are saying about this bad budget.

The Toronto Star writes, "Austerity is the hidden theme. Finance Minister Charles Sousa doesn't use the word in his budget speech."

The Globe and Mail writes, "This is the budget Liberals normally accuse Conservatives of hiding up their sleeve."

Elsewhere, the Globe writes that the 2015 budget imposes "tough austerity on health care and education."

The Ottawa Citizen remarks that the Liberals "have offered an array of goodies that seem more targeted at relatively well-off voters than at the people and sectors most hurt by the recession."

The National Post writes, "The policies and rhetoric of the federal Conservatives, famously supposed to represent the right of the political spectrum, and the provincial Liberals, famously supposed to represent the left, have ended up looking and sounding almost exactly the same." Congratulations to Kathleen Wynne for tabling a budget that rivals that of Stephen Harper.

OntarioNewsWatch writes, "I may have missed it ... but notwithstanding Kathleen Wynne's claims otherwise, I don't recall her ever mentioning she would privatize Ontario's most valuable, largest and oldest public asset—Hydro One—during the 2014 election campaign...."

"Kathleen Wynne seems to have 'crossed the floor'—"

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I would ask that when referencing a member in the Ontario Legislature that you refer to the individual, in this particular case, the Premier, as "Premier" and not as first and last name. I would beg your indulgence. Thank you very much.

1600

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. When it's outside of a quote, I absolutely will, but when it's

inside a quote, I really have no choice because that's the quote. But thank you for that, Speaker.

The bottom line is, we agree with OntarioNewsWatch, which writes, "I may have missed it ... but notwithstanding Kathleen Wynne's claims otherwise, I don't"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I recognize that you are in fact using Kathleen Wynne's name in a quote, but according to the rules of Parliament, you are not to refer to her by first and last name. Please refer to her by her title. I've been instructed by the table that that is protocol, so I would ask for your indulgence in that matter.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: All right, Speaker; I think people got the point about the "oldest public asset—Hydro One—during the 2014 election campaign." That person whose name I will not mention crossed the floor politically. And we agree. We agree that she has crossed the floor politically. We agree with OntarioNewsWatch. With a majority government, it seems that the fly-by-night progressive leanings of our Premier have suddenly disappeared for good.

To make things worse, she and her government are trying to ram this budget through and limit public consultation. It's bad enough that the Premier refuses to be straight with Ontarians about the privatization of Hydro One, but now her House leader is trying to limit public debate. Ontarians deserve the opportunity, through public hearings, to make their concerns and their suggestions known.

The government has a duty to consult widely in communities all across this province because the impacts of this budget will be felt in all corners of the province. This is the democratic process. Having a majority doesn't mean that you can ignore the people of Ontario. To try to ram this budget through and limit consultation is simply wrong. I hope the Premier will actually respect the people of Ontario enough to allow them to be heard.

I want to be clear: The sale of Hydro One is the wrong thing to do. Privatizing hydro was wrong a decade ago, and it is still wrong today. We know this. We know this because we can look to other jurisdictions as well as our own that have privatized their hydro systems or parts thereof and see the results. Right here in Ontario, it went up 25% shortly after the Conservatives privatized the generation of power in this province—25% almost overnight. Nova Scotia privatized its electricity system and now has some of the highest rates in Canada, almost rivalling those of Ontario. This story has played out in many other jurisdictions in Canada and across the US.

Privatization will be bad for Ontarians. Mark my words, Speaker, Ontarians will pay the price. Privatizing hydro will mean higher rates for Ontario families who are already paying the highest electricity rates in Canada. It will mean the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars in stable annual revenue that's needed to fund public services like hospitals and schools. It will mean less reliability and the loss of control of a critical public asset. It also means the loss of oversight by Ontario's Ombudsman, whose work has helped thousands of people—literally thousands—with hydro billing issues.

In fact, the Premier can't even guarantee that the government will retain any control whatsoever of hydro. She is looking to sell 60%. That's a majority stake, no matter how the Liberals want to spin it. That means that the government will no longer be able to make decisions that are in the public interest when it comes to electricity.

Yesterday, we learned that this Liberal government is already exploring the possibility of having a stake that is 10%, keeping only 10% of a stake in hydro or perhaps even less than that. That's not what the Premier has been telling Ontarians; it's nothing like what the Premier has been telling Ontarians.

It is time for this Premier and her government to be upfront and honest with the people of Ontario. They are privatizing Ontario's electricity system. It is wrong. They know it's wrong, but they are going to do it anyway. All of this so that the Premier can pay for Liberal scandals, for wrong choices and for bad decisions: \$1.2 billion wasted on the gas plants scandal, \$2 billion on the smart meter program that has done nothing to help with conservation efforts, another \$1 billion wasted annually to subsidize the export of power to light up the Manhattan skyline. All of this paid for on the backs of ratepayers, on the backs of families, on the backs of businesses, on the backs of Ontarians; all of these Liberal scandals paid for by the people of Ontario.

As if this weren't bad enough, when we examine this Liberal government's record on privatization, we see billions more dollars wasted: \$1 billion at eHealth, another \$1 billion at Ornge, the gas plants, the Presto card rollout, on and on and on. One of our favourites: the \$8.2 billion wasted on the wrong-headed way that this government finances our infrastructure projects. Their privatization agenda has left behind a costly legacy of waste and scandal.

The fact that the Premier and her Liberal government would gamble with Ontario's hydro system is deeply, deeply troubling to New Democrats, and it's troubling to the people of Ontario as well, especially when you think about the small return. It is a very small return: \$4 billion represents at most 3% of their 10-year infrastructure promise.

The National Post calls the Premier's scheme "flawed from the outset," saying that "selling off prized electricity assets to pay for transit projects smacked more of a cash grab than a considered approach to maximizing value and making sound energy policy."

For Ontarians who are already struggling under the weight of the highest bills in Canada, this is very, very troubling. Every day, my office is flooded with emails from people who are having to make tough decisions about how to support their families and keep the lights on.

Since the Liberal privatization announcement, I have been flooded by letters from people who believe that this reckless plan is a bad idea for Ontario. In fact, I have not received a single message of support for the Premier's privatization scheme—not a single one.

Now, it is clear that the Premier has no support whatsoever for her wrong-headed privatization scheme.

Ontarians did not vote for a platform of cuts and privatization. Ontarians didn't elect a banker to run the province, but it certainly seems that that's exactly what we ended up getting. The Premier needs to spend less time on Bay Street and more time on Main Street.

You know what, Speaker? If she did listen to Ontarians, she would hear loud and clear that she does not have a mandate to privatize our hydro. New Democrats have always believed in investing in transit and infrastructure, but not at the cost of a short-sighted sell-off of our hydro public assets. This Premier is the first Premier in 100 years who can't figure out how to build infrastructure without selling our electricity system. How sad.

Ontario's New Democrats are going to fight this sell-off, because Ontarians know that this is absolutely the wrong plan, because once it's gone, it is gone for good.

In the coming days and weeks, my caucus and I are going to be in communities across the province. What we are going to do is hold town halls. We are going to be talking to Ontarians about their opportunity to sign petitions, asking people to write to their Liberal MPPs, encouraging them to take that voice that they have and use it to tell their MPPs what they really think, and we're going to be doing much, much more.

The Premier of this province, the Liberal Premier, may want to shut Ontarians down, but New Democrats want to do the opposite. New Democrats want to respect Ontarians by giving them a chance to have a voice on this extremely important issue. Do you know why, Speaker? Because Ontarians deserve to have a voice. They deserve to be heard. They deserve to be respected, because they will be the ones paying the price.

But there's much, much more bad news for Ontarians in this budget, and I'm going to spend a few seconds on that. We already have nurses on the picket line. We have hospitals and wards closing in communities all around the province. We have hospitals that have been running in situations of overcapacity for months on end. In fact, I was just in Thunder Bay hearing from front-line staff about that very issue. We have nurses being fired. All of this is the result of the 2014 budget, Speaker.

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This year's budget imposes even harsher cuts. The Ontario Medical Association said of this budget that it "puts the health care system at risk." While health care costs are increasing in the range of 3% to 5% annually in terms of inflationary pressures, the government is only increasing spending by 1.2%, barely the rate of inflation.

As the Ontario Health Coalition has said, "The real-dollar cuts across ... health care also mean damaging—and potentially irreversible—cuts, closures and privatization of needed health care."

The RPNAO, the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario, makes it clear that front-line staff "will continue to suffer from increased workloads, stress, burnout and the moral distress associated with watching in frustration as their patients fail to get the level and quality of care they deserve."

Unifor puts it more starkly: "Keeping the health care budget ... below inflation puts lives at risk."

On top of the underfunding of Ontario's health care system, this Liberal government will also be implementing, for the fourth consecutive year, hospital funding freezes. I would like to note that the ministry refused to answer any direct questions from my staff about hospital funding, but these freezes have been confirmed by ONA, the Ontario Nurses' Association, and the Toronto Star—so much for the openness and transparency of the openness and transparency Premier. I think she forget her openness and transparency when she started to prepare this budget.

As I was saying, this Liberal government will freeze hospital budgets for the fourth consecutive year. This represents the longest unbroken period of real-dollar public hospital cuts in Ontario's history. This will have a devastating impact, as we all know, on our hospitals. People will wait longer for service. They will travel further distances to get the care they need. There will be more shortages of beds and more overcrowding. There will be real consequences because of these cuts.

The Ontario Nurses' Association makes it very clear that "another consecutive year of hospital funding freezes means that registered nurses will be cut, leaving hospital patients in Ontario at an increased risk of complications and even death." That's a pretty strong statement. That will be on the heads of the Liberals sitting across the way.

This is the Liberal government's transformation of Ontario's health care system: Fewer resources for our health professionals, even as our aging population puts increasing demands on the system. New Democrats believe that Ontarians deserve properly funded, high-quality health care regardless of where they live in this province; it is a right that they all deserve. This includes northern Ontario, rural Ontario and southwestern Ontario, where people are seeing their local hospitals threatened. These communities deserve high-quality health care as much as anyone else in Ontario, as much as people who live in major urban centres, who have the luxury of a number of other hospitals at their disposal.

I want to be clear, Speaker. New Democrats believe that this budget does great harm, possibly irreversible harm, to Ontario's health care system.

Look at education, and once again what we see in this budget is more Liberal cuts. This budget cuts education, closes schools and fires teachers. The Liberals have already cut \$250 million so far this year as they work towards cutting half a billion dollars from education. In addition, there will be a complete freeze on spending from 2016-18, while during this period, inflation is projected by their own admission to be about 2% each year. This means even deeper cuts are on the horizon for education. Families, parents and students are already feeling the pinch, and they are seeing the results of all of this first-hand. They're watching as teachers and early childhood educators are being fired. Already, we have disrupted classrooms and students out of school, because these Liberal cuts are hurting education.

Meanwhile communities—especially some of the province's most struggling communities—are staring down the possibility of seeing schools in their communities close. This, once again, so-called modernization—if it's not transformation, it's modernization—strategy will tear the soul out of these hard-working neighbourhoods. We know that this is short-sighted, and we do not agree with the direction of this government when it comes to education. We know—absolutely everybody is aware—that there is an ebb and flow to school enrolment, and that many of these same areas are seeing an influx of new Canadians at the same time as young families as well. So five years down the road, we will be struggling to keep up with demand in these very same areas where the Liberals are now closing down schools. It is very, very short-sighted.

New Democrats believe that we should be smarter when it comes to our schools. Our schools are valuable neighbourhood assets that could be used to provide badly needed child care spaces or seniors' programming or even rental space that would provide revenues. Closing our public schools is not only short-sighted; it is wasteful and, frankly, New Democrats think it is wrong.

Unfortunately, our post-secondary education system doesn't seem to fare any better in this budget. The government is committing to three years of funding cuts to Ontario's universities and colleges. Three years of funding cuts is what's in that budget. High-quality post-secondary education is a big part of what gives Ontario an edge as a labour force on the world stage. In fact, I don't know how many times I sat in this chamber and heard Liberal Premiers say the exact same thing: that top-notch post-secondary education was what was going to make sure that we were going to have a top-notch labour force that was going to be able to compete globally with anybody else around the world.

I have to say that the Liberal Premier of Ontario has abandoned all belief in that goal. These cuts leave groups like OCUFA "questioning the government's commitment to a high-quality higher education system that is truly public, high quality and accessible to every student." Further, they say, "Students, contract faculty members and their families are now paying for the government's unwillingness to invest in universities. In the longer term, every Ontarian will feel the effects of the erosion of public university funding."

The Ontario federation of students calls the Ontario Liberal government's 2015 budget "another missed opportunity to address the chronic underfunding of post-secondary education that has made Ontario the most expensive province in which to attend college or university." The proposed changes to OSAP do little to address the upfront costs of post-secondary education of Ontario students, who are already paying the highest tuition rates in all of Canada.

New Democrats believe that we need to invest in our post-secondary education system if we are going to be able to build the best possible 21st-century workforce. It is unfair for the government to saddle a generation of students with an unbearable debt burden. This will only

hurt our province's economy in the future. Once again, this Liberal government is being short-sighted and putting the burden of our province's recovery on the backs of those who can least afford it.

This brings me to northern Ontario, a region that is no stranger to being ignored by this Liberal government. It should come as no surprise that the 2015 budget, once again, ignores the priorities of northern Ontario. This Liberal budget, once again, has northern families paying the price while getting nothing—zilch—in return. It does nothing to address the electricity needs of the mining industry. It does nothing to address the government's failure to form meaningful partnerships with First Nations leaders. It does nothing to address the failure of leadership on the Ring of Fire development.

In fact, the budget tells us that there will be no investment in the Ring of Fire until after the next election. They're punting their promise that they made in this last election campaign—another billion dollars, they announced at an election campaign a year ago, and now they're saying, "We're not doing any of that until sometime maybe in 2018-19. Thank you very much, northern Ontario. We're going to wash our hands of you for the next couple of years." Really, it is just unbelievable.

The bottom line is, I was in Thunder Bay during the last election when the Premier did make that announcement. Somehow I don't recall it—because it wasn't done. She didn't mention at all the fact that there would be no funding until 2018-19.

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You know what? I have to sadly say—and I'm sure my northern colleagues here would agree—it's not a surprise. It is not surprising. It continues the sorry legacy that this Liberal government has shown on the Ring of Fire: complete lack of leadership. It is absolutely shameful: more than seven years of announcements and ribbon cuttings and blah blah blah, as our old friend Rosario Marchese would have said; oh, sorry, the ex-member, the former member. Should I say that, Speaker? The former member for Trinity-Spadina.

But more than seven years of announcements and not a single thing to show for it. There is nothing in this budget for the north—nothing, big goose egg. A few re-announcements about roads—yes. Continuation of a \$30-million cut to the NIER Program—yes. A step back from meaningful commitments to First Nations communities—yes. I think we went backwards in this budget when it comes to the north.

The Liberals even managed to claw back that meagre commitment from the 2014 budget to First Nations.

The Liberal legacy in the north is one of a failure of leadership, full stop.

In wrapping up, Speaker, I want to say very clearly to the people of Ontario: This is a bad, bad budget. It is the wrong budget for today's Ontario. It is the wrong budget for Ontario families. It is the wrong budget for Ontario businesses—small, medium, large. It is the wrong budget for agriculture.

It is a budget that will hurt Ontarians not only this year but for many, many generations to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Continuing with debate, I recognize the member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the leader for setting the tone for this budget. I think that she hit all the right notes. She accurately communicated the frustration that all of us are hearing in our own ridings across this province.

My commentary after attending the lock-up, after attending the financial briefing—which I must thank the finance staff from the ministry for delivering yesterday. They're very committed people. When we asked the hard questions, they helped us peel back the layers on this budget. I want to thank them for that.

The theme that I'd like to focus on, actually, is that this budget, budget 2015, doubles down on austerity from last year's budget. Every ministry, last budget, had a 6% cut. We didn't hear too much about that during the election. It's very unfortunate because people bought in to a definition of "progressive" which, quite honestly, we've had to move away from because it was just not true.

This budget has 5.5% cuts in every ministry as well, with the exception of four ministries. But if we learned from last year's budget, those cuts actually happened and they're actually listed in this budget as well. Even though we heard that some ministries were safe, that was not the case.

What I really want to focus on is that this budget is predicated on, and the spin around this budget is, that the selling off of Hydro One is good for the people of this province when, quite honestly, it isn't.

With the release of the budget last Thursday and the tabling of the budget motion, we know that the Liberals' first priority is to sell off Hydro One. They are so desperate for revenue that they are willing to sell off the future of this province on reliable energy, on revenues from Hydro One and on rates that actually will only have one direction to go, and that is up. That's clear from schedule 9.

It's also clear from all of the schedules which remove Hydro One from oversight, which is quite an undertaking—that is, removing oversight from all of the legislative officers. This is the other side of the coin. The Financial Accountability Officer loses oversight; the Auditor General loses oversight; the Ombudsman of Ontario loses oversight by taking away Hydro One's status as a public sector entity.

The goal of this budget obviously is for a quick cash grab. The people of this province, I think, are waking up to the reality of this sale. Certainly, and what they tell me in the grocery store, in the library and in the schoolyard, is that this was not part of the platform. The ministry—the Premier—does not have a mandate to sell off Hydro One. Yet here we are, looking for a quick cash grab—in all the wrong places, I would say.

There are dozens of schedules in this budget bill, but the thrust is to double down on the selling off of Hydro One before most Ontarians even know what's going on.

We've been determined to share the story of what's happening in this House with the people of this province, but thankfully there are some very progressive voices in the media who have actually weighed in on this. One of them—this was just in the *Globe and Mail* on April 27. Mr. Laxer says, "In truth, the big losers will be Ontarians. They will be reduced from owners of the system to its tenants and they will pay out extra billions to the new owners in the decades to come."

That's essentially what's happening. The people of this province are losing this important asset. They're going to become tenants in this electricity system, and I think it's pretty safe to say that there's not going to be any rent control. If we've learned anything from the past, Mr. Speaker, it's that rates will only go up.

The Liberal government will say that there's no choice. That's the theme here. The Premier stands up, day in and day out, and says, "No, we don't have any choice in the matter." In order to make investments in transit and infrastructure, they say that we have to follow the advice of Bay Street, regardless of the conflict of interest that exists on this file.

We just learned this morning that we paid \$7 million for this advice, and what did they say that the province should do? Well, it's not surprising what they said. They said, "We should sell off Hydro One to the private sector." Imagine that, Mr. Speaker. Imagine that a group of private sector consultants, with connections to all of the Bay Street players, would recommend that our publicly owned electricity distributor should be sold off—

Ms. Cindy Forster: I thought Ed worked for free.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's true. Mr. Clark said he was working for free. But \$7 million is not free. We didn't get a fair deal on this transaction.

It's even more surprising when you consider that Hydro One-OPG made windfall profits of an additional \$371 million last year. It's really quite surprising that the private sector would want a cut of that annual revenue. Of course, they're looking for that revenue, and they see a willing partner in the Premier of this province.

But the Liberals remain committed to telling you that there's no choice. If you want transit, Hydro One must be sold. That's the deal. It's the only way.

They also announced the modernization of alcohol policy in the province on the same day, just to say, "Look over here. We've got six-packs in the Walmart and we've got 12-packs over here in 10 LCBO stores. Don't pay attention, folks, to what's really going on in the province."

What if I told you that the \$4 billion that the government will make by selling off the 60% of Hydro One is only 3%? This is an important piece. You are absolutely gambling the future of our electricity system, of reliable rates, of affordable electricity—for what? For 3%. It has been said that this won't even pay for half of some of the big projects that you promised—or that you actually reannounced—in this last budget. It's a drop in the bucket.

But it is amazing that you have to go to the extreme of selling off this strategic, reliable, public asset for \$4 billion when you could find money, no problem, when it was making a private energy company whole—you made whole a private energy company during the gas plant scandal. There was no problem whatsoever finding that kind of cash.

Let's get back to the impact on the people of this province, because what's really going to happen—because we know from our history what's going to happen—is that rates are going to go up, reliability will go down, and the province will lose an extremely valuable source of revenue.

Let's cover how the rates will go up.

Right now, there's no incentive to increase Hydro One's profits. The mandate of Hydro One as an organization is to deliver reliable energy to Ontarians and remit any revenue above operating costs back to the province. There's no one at the board suggesting that a renovation on a power line shouldn't be done this year because it would look bad on the quarterly report of the shareholders. But that changes as soon as Hydro One starts issuing shares. Once this budget passes, the public loses control over Hydro One and then, according to the government, the OEB will protect ratepayers. Well, we know that that actually is not the track record of the OEB in the province of Ontario.

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Rates have gone up three times since 2002. They have tripled. All of us in this House fully understand that the people in our ridings cannot afford for those rates to continue to go up.

It is also worth noting that the energy rates are now three times higher than they were when the Harris Conservatives started privatizing the energy system, and there has been inconsistency in delivery of those rates. There's no rhyme or reason to it, quite honestly.

Right now, there are thousands of people in this province who are having to choose between paying their energy bills and putting food on the table. That's not right. That should be Premier Wynne's focus, not what's in the best interests of Bay Street. It is time to get our priorities straight in this House and put people first.

As soon as this budget passes, there will be no recourse for Ontarians. That's why this is such a serious issue. Accountability will be gone. Transparency will be gone. Annual revenue will be gone. This government is slamming the door on transparency and accountability on the electricity file.

As it stands, the Ombudsman, the Auditor General and the privacy commissioner etc. can all investigate Hydro One. That kind of oversight improves things for consumers and energy users. The Ombudsman reports and Auditor General reports make energy delivery better because Ontarians can tell the government and the opposition the challenges that they are facing. This budget removes that oversight in several schedules.

Even if the IPO doesn't happen for a few years, oversight is gone when this budget passes. That, in and of

itself, tells the people of this province whose interests this budget is in. It is not in their interest; it's in the interests of Bay Street.

The profit motive going forward with this new, privatized Hydro One will drive up rates in Ontario, and I think, fundamentally, people understand this. Even the Premier and Ed Clark wouldn't deny that possibility on the day they released this paper. They prefer to talk about beer, but we really tried hard to bring it back to the rates. Rates are going to go up, and Ontarians will no longer be able to count on oversight to protect them or to shine a light on the problems that exist.

Reliability is a related problem. Private shareholders will have no reason to invest in the distribution system to ensure it is reliable—that people in every corner of the province get the power that they need. Instead, the first concern will be shareholders. Sure, the province will be a shareholder, but not the majority shareholder. That loss of control will doom energy reliability.

We heard yesterday, in our finance briefing, that the government has not crafted this piece of legislation to ensure that they will remain the majority holder. In fact, they've left that door wide open. The day that this announcement was made, a member of the media, from the Toronto Star, asked the Premier outright, "Is this the thin edge of the wedge? What else is for sale in the province of Ontario?" Quite honestly, the answer was, "Do you know what? We're going to see how this goes." So that door is open. That's why the fight to protect Hydro One in the best interests of the people of this province is a fight worth fighting for.

On the revenue side, for a government that is desperate for revenue, giving up hundreds of millions of dollars—annual dollars—that go to our schools and hospitals is incredibly short-sighted. It's inconceivable that we're even debating this issue. We should be debating job creation. We should be talking about an industrial energy rate. We should be talking about the youth unemployment rate and how to inspire investors in the province of Ontario to get our young people back to work. Instead, we're talking about such a misguided plan. Really, it's essentially throwing money right out the door, because once this asset is gone, it is gone, gone, gone. There is no recourse for the people of this province.

It's important for us to remember that this Premier has no mandate to do this. The average Ontarian, if you talk to them, had no idea that Hydro One was going to be for sale. They refuse to this day to say that they are selling off Hydro One. They refuse to say that they are privatizing. They say "unlocking" or "broadening the ownership." I guess it's time to broaden the definition of "progressive," because there's nothing progressive about selling off Hydro One.

I do think it's important to remember why we are here, in this place, in this time, in the province of Ontario. We heard a lot about what leadership is. Leadership is about making decisions, and it's also about choices. This Premier has made some pretty devastating choices, Mr.

Speaker, for the people of this province. She would have Ontarians believe that there is in fact no choice, that there is no recourse, that this has to happen. We challenge the premise of that wholeheartedly. She says that she must sell assets to pay for infrastructure, but we also know the choices that they have made, that she has made.

We should remember that when the Premier was the Minister of Transportation back in 2010, she chose to remove \$4 billion from the transit file, to cut that \$4 billion from transit so her government could then give corporations a tax break that cost the provincial treasury \$2.5 billion every year, an amount that could completely fund the Big Move.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This did happen. Potentially, if that had not happened, we would be receiving \$2.5 billion every year to completely fund the Big Move, with enough left over to restore provincial funding for transit operations. Then you wouldn't have to be going back on all of these transit promises. It's like a moving target, your transit strategy.

We've heard for so long in Kitchener-Waterloo—the transit promises that have come in and out of our region would make your head spin, honestly, Mr. Speaker. Just before the election, the Premier and the minister of the day came to town and stood on the same train station platform as us. They said “two-way, all-day,” “electrified,” “every 15 minutes,” “high-speed rail for \$500 million”—

Ms. Cindy Forster: A bullet.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We even heard of this bullet train. They pulled out all the stops. Well, there is no two-way, all-day. There are no 10,000 people who can get to Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Is it in the budget?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's not in the budget.

There was, at one time, though, in a budget a promise of \$600 million for the LRT. That \$600 million, of course, was never realized. It actually got cut by 50%, to \$300 million.

What is in the budget is the re-announcement of Highway 7. This is eight years of Highway 7. It's like Groundhog Day. There are only so many ribbons you can cut.

Let's remember choices, because for the Premier to stand up and say she has no choice—she had choices, and she could focus more on the revenue streams that are needed for this province instead of cutting. Quite honestly, some of these cuts are going to be devastating for the ministries. We've already heard from some of them.

Essentially, what this budget does is really throws everything under the bus except for infrastructure. That comment came from Hugh Mackenzie. He makes some really good points as well. He says, “Elementary and secondary education spending is going up at less than the rate of inflation, and that includes the remaining cost of implementing full-day kindergarten.” That's an important piece, Mr. Speaker, because this government throws a big number back at us on education.

Whatever new money they did put in education went to FDK. The Rozanski report identified \$2 billion in cuts from the former Harris government; those are still standing. Those cuts are systemic. They are built in to the education funding, and your own budget actually demonstrates that \$248 million has been removed from education. That's why it's in brackets in this chart.

“Post-secondary education will actually be dropping at a rate of 0.4% per year on the way to budget balance.” We met with university students—the member from London West and I met with OUSA last week—and they can't believe it. They can't believe that these cuts are happening because that's not what they were promised. It's a bit of a wake-up call, actually, for a lot of groups across the province.

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Of course, health care will increase at less than inflation, so that essentially is a cut.

At this point, there's no comprehensive strategy for aging in the province of Ontario. We had a round table in our riding—and I know that this is an issue across the province—around a lack of a dementia strategy, an aging strategy for the seniors in our communities. If you sit down and listen to these people, if you get out of this place and you listen to the real people of this province, if you don't just spend your time on Bay Street, you actually can hear the pain that people are experiencing because this government has no strategy to deal with an aging demographic.

The health care funding as it stands today will actually drive more people to the emergency rooms, and that costs more money. These cuts will not lead us back to prosperity. It is, pure and simple, an austerity budget.

Social assistance benefits: Both Ontario Works and ODSP are still lower, by 5% to 7% after accounting for inflation, than where they were at the end of the Harris era. So this really is about priorities.

Bay Street gets their attention. The consultants make \$7 million for a report that recommends a financial strategy which, quite honestly, is bad for the economy of this province, and they get priority status. It is really incredible.

Also, taking a step back just to look at the critical gaps which are already evident in this budget: The ministries that received the 6% cut, everything from worker safety—here we are on the day of mourning, five years past the mandatory recommendations that came out of the Dean report. There were 11; one of them was working at heights training, one was the swing stage—these have not been enacted, and that costs money, too.

When you're creating legislation or when you're directing funds to those respective ministries, if you're not being proactive or adopting an early intervention piece, or even a compassionate perspective on these issues, you end up spending more money down the road.

What I think is really more disappointing than ever is that this government had the opportunity to actually demonstrate that they understood that there is a revenue problem in the province of Ontario. You just have to look

at the budget itself, as contained in the charts. One of those, obviously, is job creation. This government predicted that last year they would create 67,000 jobs; based on the numbers contained in your own budget, those jobs were not realized. That is lost revenue.

You have to peel back the layers and find out why those jobs were not created. A lot of it actually goes back to energy, because we lost those good-paying manufacturing jobs. When people think about investing in the province of Ontario, the energy rate is at the top of the list. So we are not drawing that kind of investment because of energy. At the same time, we're contemplating cutting off one of the major revenue streams that we receive from OPG and Hydro One, as is indicated in your very budget.

There are a number of other issues that we obviously need to talk about. Hydro One: Our leader covered the entire complement of issues that this sale will bring.

The other issue, of course, is the ORPP. I have to say that the huge red flag for us on the creation of the ORPP Administration Corp., as was dictated in this budget, is the very fact that on pages 148 and 149, this government is putting out an RFP for a third party to come and manage the ORPP. If this government's track record is anything for us to be concerned about—and it is; your track record is not good on these issues—one has only to look at the Auditor General's report to verify how poorly you manage these issues.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, it is negative. It is negative when money goes to Bay Street and not to the programs that we want. It is negative.

If you were trying to create a public pension plan and managing it in-house with the expertise of the excellent civil service, then that might be a different issue, but you've put out an RFP for a third party to come in. If we look at what happened in BC, seven out of the 10 top public servants were managing that pension fund, so they're doing okay. Some of the money that they are making is, quite honestly, obscene for managing a pension fund, when every dollar that is collected for a public pension plan should go into that plan for the people that it was originally created to serve. We have huge issues with the ORPP, but mainly, all of those issues are predicated on the fact that we don't trust you to do it properly.

Obviously, the ORPP Administration Corp. will also not be subject to the Corporations Information Act. Again, it's another agency, another stand-alone third-party group to run wild with the money that's in this province. The lack of oversight that you'll have on this should be concerning to you, if you care about where the money is going, if you do care about where the funding goes.

The other issue that I want to raise falls under schedule 40 under the Taxation Act. This government has promised to strengthen apprenticeships. There's \$23 million targeted. At the same time as the \$23 million is on this side, you're removing the tax credit for the private

sector to actually bring those apprenticeships—you're cutting it by \$55 million.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Actually, we do. We come from the side of the House that knows that tax credits are a very accountable way. We really support the job creator tax credit: You create a job and you get a tax credit. If you don't know this, then you should know this: There is a huge gap on the skilled trades side. There's a huge calling for the trades in this province, which ironically is very much connected to the infrastructure file. You need the people to actually build the infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. By withdrawing or cutting this tax credit, you're actually disincentivizing the apprenticeship program, very—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Is that a word?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, listen, if you can say "unlocking" instead of "selling," then I can say "disincentivizing."

One of the other issues is that even from an economic perspective, those industries that are actually thriving, like the Ontario film industry—this is especially important for Toronto. The film industry contributes to restaurants and hotels. Those are good jobs, especially when those child actors are treated appropriately—our member will be bringing forward that bill. And yet, now you're cutting that tax credit. You have to know how important the arts are to the economy. You have to know how really vulnerable that field still is to actually add a whole other layer of insecurity to it by actually withdrawing that tax credit.

In trying to wrap up a little bit, a significant amount of amendments propose treating the ORPP Administration Corp., as well as Hydro One and its subsidiaries, as non-public entities. You are fully embracing privatization. You're not even hiding it anymore. You won't say it, but I have to tell you, it's out there in the open.

A six-month transition period from royal assent is provided for Hydro One and its subsidiaries, so you get six months for the Auditor General, who is now conducting a current investigation of Hydro One—she has six months to finish up her audit because this government wants to sell Hydro One, and then she won't get to review those findings in two years because she won't have access to the information. So she's doing an audit on Hydro One and then basically nothing will happen. If there are some serious recommendations, they won't be put into place.

Interjection: It's too late.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's too late. Sorry, you're out of luck. The people of the province are out of luck. Hydro One is on the chopping block. Just turn your lights off a lot more.

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At the end of six months, Hydro One and its subsidiaries will no longer be under the purview of the Auditor General. They will no longer be required to disclose employee salaries. They will no longer be required to cap executive salaries. Of course, the issue of a hard cap on

public sector CEOs is a long-standing issue, but you won't have to worry about that anymore. It will no longer be under the purview of the Financial Accountability Officer. They will no longer be required to disclose financial information to the minister beyond consolidated financial statements. It will no longer be under the purview of the Management Board of Cabinet, under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act—don't worry about that—or the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It will no longer be under Ombudsman oversight, it will no longer be under the Integrity Commissioner's oversight, including relating expenses, and it won't be under the Trillium Trust Act.

So you're really just setting it free, fingers crossed, hoping for the best with some sort of mantra, like "Just trust us." Well, nobody trusts this government. Nobody does; it has to be said.

The governance piece of the ORPP is so important. They've pushed this all to the regulations. By doing that, which is a growing trend in this Legislature, they're actually removing us from the process as duly elected representatives. They're putting all those details over to the regulations, where quite honestly we can't get to them. That was a frustrating part, actually, at the finance briefing yesterday.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Kind of like a Harper omnibus bill.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is. I mean, the similarities between this Premier and Mr. Harper are astounding to me.

Next, I am expecting some version of Bill 51—but of course that already happened under McGuinty when former Chief Blair was in charge. He has a new definition of what a kettle is, I can tell you that much.

So here we are in the province of Ontario. We have a government that continues to lose confidence from an economic perspective. They've indicated how short-sighted they are by putting Hydro One on the chopping block and indicating, quite honestly, to the people of this province that they're not interested in that annual income, that they are not interested in keeping hydro rates down, that they are not interested in ensuring some level of reliability for the hydro system.

I think that it's really clear to a lot of people, and it certainly is clear to us, that not only does this budget not meet the needs of the people of this province, it puts the wrong people at the top of the priority list. We need to fight this.

In a recent interview, I pleaded with people in my riding to pay attention. People need to pay attention to what is going on in this Legislature. They need to know how short-sighted this strategy is. We are going to be following the money, obviously, as this budget unfolds.

Clearly, this government thinks that they can do whatever they want. They've appointed an assistant finance minister in Mr. Clark to come down with these strategies, which do not serve the people of this province. Then they distract us with beer announcements. If it wasn't so serious and if it wasn't so painful, it might resemble

some version of a Monty Python movie, because nobody is buying what this government is selling. The only party that's standing up for the people of this province are New Democrats, and we're going to continue to fight this each and every day.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Soo Wong: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Ms. Wong moves adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Agreed. Carried.

Debate adjourned.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE RÉGIME DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 27, 2015, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 56, Loi exigeant l'établissement du Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): When this item of business was last debated, we had completed questions and comments on the speech by the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is as always, of course, a pleasure to rise in this House to speak to any bill, particularly one of such importance; and also to follow up on what we just heard from the leader of our province—leader of our party; hopefully, eventually, the leader of the province—and our finance critic on the budget. Many of the issues intertwine. Certainly we heard about the proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, and that's what I'm speaking to: the ORPP Act, 2015, Bill 56.

Undoubtedly in this province, workers are having a hard time making ends meet. We can point to several areas within our provincial economy that have created an imbalance and inequity in incomes, retirement security and pension security. Inevitably, that has led this government to attempt to do something about it, from a chorus of stakeholders and everyday Ontarians who are calling for some measures on the part of this government and the federal government to protect and ensure that workers in this province who dedicate their lives and many years to an employer are able to retire with dignity and security. We assume that's what this government is attempting to do through the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act.

Now, two thirds or 66.7% of Ontarians do not currently have a workplace pension. Imagine, you work your entire life—and more and more people in our economy and more and more job seekers and those who enter the labour market are finding employment with what we

know now as precarious work, which delivers a job, certainly, but not a career and not a vocation, not something that we know traditionally gave families and individuals the ability to raise a family, to live that Ontario dream, that Canadian dream: to afford a home, afford to make those expenditures and afford to save. No longer are those the dominant jobs available in the workforce.

I've done it many times. I'm able to juxtapose free trade and the elimination of those provisions, protection mechanisms, into a lot of our economic hardships. You point to that point in time when we lost so much of our domestic manufacturing, the backbone of our economy specifically here in Ontario.

What I say is that the economic shift or the demographic shift in the jobs that are available is directly related to the measures taken on the part of the various federal and provincial governments over the years. Nonetheless, we're here today attempting to deal with those ramifications.

We know that 66.7% of Ontarians do not currently have a workplace pension, and some Ontarians with insufficient workplace pensions also still struggle into retirement. Undoubtedly, we have a retirement crisis in the province of Ontario. We know that when people have disposable income at the end of their working careers, something that they can literally bank on, they have a whole host, a variety of better social outcomes, whether it be health or whether it be security of self, and also economic generation in the buying capacity that so many organizations would point to as being an important metric in a healthy, stable economy.

When we have an aging demographic that has purchasing power, we have an overall healthy economy. That's no longer the case. Baby boomers are now competing with their children for decent-paying jobs—this is after their entire working career—because of the change, that seismic shift in the nature of work in the province and, I would argue, the entire country, where we no longer have built into workplaces the provisions of a defined benefit plan, which was the staple, which was the benchmark of what we would call a good-paying job in the province.

1700

What we find now is precarious part-time work, contract work that often doesn't give any benefits whatsoever and leaves people even more vulnerable—and these are for older workers even. Imagine what it's like for young workers entering the labour market. Imagine what it's like for young workers who have incurred massive post-secondary education debt. The prospects are bleak, and we see no measures on the part of the government trying to attempt to remedy that, although this is one signal that can potentially give a little bit of hope that they're even talking about it.

I think, more so, it's not born out of the ideology of the Liberal Party or the Liberal government; it is born out of the demand of Ontarians for this government or any government to do something. I would definitely say that

the negligence on the part of the federal government to take any action towards enhancing the Canada Pension Plan, the GIS or the OAS is the reason why we're talking about this today. No doubt, economists and pension retirement experts would point to enhancements in our Canada Pension Plan as being probably the most effective, efficient vehicle to ensure retirement security. I know that in 2005, 2007, 2008, 2011, Jack Layton, the late former leader of the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. Thank you. I don't want to detract from the speaker, but there appear to be some additional conversations going on on the side. Please do your best to use your inside voice, because I do want to hear what the speaker has to say.

Mr. Todd Smith: You're the Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I'm the Speaker, but he's the speaker right now.

Start the clock. Back to the speaker.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. I think I needed a water break anyhow, but I appreciate the attention of the House and your organization of this place.

Jack Layton campaigned on the idea, on the principle of expanding and enhancing the Canada Pension Plan. The premise was, over the course of the next seven years, to double the CPP, to double the eligible benefits for the CPP.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: That's when the retirement age was 65.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: That's true: It was when the retirement age was 65. Stephen Harper has since increased it to age 67, so you're going to be working longer for less.

When I campaigned on that issue alone, it really resonated. It certainly resonated within those who are nearing or at retirement, but also within a younger demographic that understood that it was important for them to have some sort of secure financial vehicle—because the markets these days are, as I would imagine they always have been, quite volatile. We don't have to look too far back in this decade to see where many retirees and many who invested in RRSPs lost much of their value in their retirement savings. Even in private pension funds, we saw an enormous decrease in value.

We would also point to the fact that this government and the federal government have yet to enact legislation to protect those who are invested in private pension plans, another initiative of the federal NDP, which brought about a piece of legislation that was called the workers first bill. We've seen far too many times where multinational corporations would, for one reason or another, declare bankruptcy in this country and absolve themselves of any of their responsibilities to the retirees and to those who have contributed to pension plans. They go at the bottom of the list when it comes to insolvency and bankruptcy. So you've got a mechanism where

you've got law in this country that doesn't protect people who already invest in private plans. Wouldn't we, as a government, want to look at that provision first before we start to bring in other areas, where we're essentially making up for the failures of private enterprise to provide security for those pensioners and those workers under their own retirement plans?

My colleague Paul Miller from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek has brought forward a bill in the last sitting of the House that called on this government to secure and augment the pension benefit guarantee to \$2,500 a month in that exact case: where corporations would declare bankruptcy and the fund set up under the pension benefit guarantee would enhance what their eligibility is.

It's something that is called on not only by those who have already been through this, such as Nortel workers—we know the experience that they've had through the insolvency and bankruptcy of the former Nortel—and it has also been called on by a lot of blue-collar workers in larger corporations who are vulnerable as well when large entities declare bankruptcy.

That's something that is an aside to what's happening here. Speaker, this bill as it is—and as it stands is, of course, the first of three parts of a bill that will eventually, potentially, probably, maybe bring about some form of a mechanism for people to have some semblance of retirement security—it is essentially a shell of a bill. It gives the government the ability to create an administration corporation.

What they have done is—and we read this in the recent budget—they will release an RFP to manage the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. What does that mean for everyday Ontarians? An RFP—a request for proposals—has been sent out to, I guess, everyone; anyone who thinks that they have the abilities, the skills and the experience to manage a large pension plan. Who could that be? It very well could be the next Ornge, without the right oversight, without the right accountability.

I see members of the government shaking their heads, “No, no, no.” They don't think it could ever happen again, but the minister without portfolio, I think, fails to learn from his own mistakes and those of his government. As we have seen so many times, they are abdicating their responsibility to deliver effective policy and effective governance for the people of this province, and it is to the detriment of those who live here for them to not do the work that they are called on to do.

To outsource this most important role to private entities that will inevitably have their own agendas when given a large sum of money, when given management and power and control without oversight, without accountability—Speaker, this is an I-told-you-so moment. We are telling you: Do not do this. Take control, take ownership, take management, take responsibility.

If you're going to deliver such an integral component of the retirement security that people are counting on, that you campaigned on, then, by goodness, take responsibility for it; do it right. Take the consultation that you heard in the committee reports and the committee

travelling of this bill from experts in financial management who said, “You really shouldn't relinquish the control of such an important fund and what ultimately will be quite a large sum of money, given that 50% of eligible workers in the province will be contributing to it.” Inherently there's a problem there as well, because if it is truly to benefit the province at large, as the Canada Pension Plan does, being universal and being portable, it should have the most buy-in possible. But we've given a lot of outs, as it were, a lot of escape routes for many in private industry to not contribute to a plan that should be universal and should be accessible by all.

What we think is going to happen, Speaker, is that the government will deem comparable plans as being defined contribution plans, as opposed to what could be, and what we know to be, more beneficial to retirees: defined benefit plans. What we don't understand is how they can be comparable when defined contribution plans are at the whim of the market on many occasions and do not account for major losses in retirement security for the workers who contribute to them. So for them to be comparable is maybe a misnomer, but ultimately the government sees fit to allow that as an opt-out provision.

1710

The federal government should be playing a role here, there's no doubt. I don't think this government has imposed or attempted to impose the correct amount of pressure that they could on the federal government. We hear a little bit through the Finance Minister that they wish the federal government would be playing a bigger role. We do not hear that from their federal cousins in the Liberal Party—any type of pressure of that sort. We would imagine that they should be working in concert to try to take that road.

Imagine what the province of Ontario could do. Imagine what a majority government in the province of Ontario could do to leverage that type of pressure on the federal government. They haven't. We haven't seen anything. It's very unfortunate that we haven't used more effort to make that happen because we know that is the most efficient and effective vehicle for Ontarians and Canadians at large to be able to retire with dignity and security. The CPP is a massive fund. It is well regarded. It is globally recognized as being a force not only for retirement security, affordability and livability but also through the management provisions of the CPP.

Those are some of the questions that we have as well that don't exist in this shell of a bill, questions that we don't have answers to. What will those administration provisions be? Once you accept a RFP, how much is it going to cost us to manage this massive Ontario Retirement Pension Plan? We know that it's going to be a whole bunch. It's going to be a whole lot more, I think, than if you were to do it in-house.

Maybe, inherently, that is the difference ideologically between them and us. We actually think we can do it. We believe in some of those public sector managers out there that already—like the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan; that is another globally regarded powerhouse that has

returned massive dividends to its shareholders and to its contributors, the teachers of this province. We think we could tap into that type of knowledge base. We think we can do it at less of a premium than what the government is ultimately doing.

If you look at the similarities between what they're doing with this and what they do with other components and other integral systems in the province, we've seen this plan play out. The wording might be different. The mechanics might be different. Of course, the issue is different. But ultimately, we see a government that continues to abdicate its responsibility, to outsource any involvement in the public sector and to relinquish control and oversight of important, vital components of our economy.

Why don't you believe in yourselves? Why can't you trust yourselves? I guess I don't blame you given your track record. What we think is that there is a better way to do this. There is a more effective and efficient way to do this.

Unfortunately, we're already seeing with this bill that you're heading down the wrong path. We see that many of the amendments that not only ourselves but the opposition PC Party put forward that may have been non-contentious—some of the ideas that came out of committee deliberations and committee testimony were completely ignored. You heard from experts. You heard from those who have seen these types of plans play out. However, we saw minimal amendments to Bill 56 that make it a broader, more fair and more efficient retirement savings vehicle.

We put forward our own plan, something that mirrored the Canada Pension Plan, something that was designed to be a defined benefit, something that was transparent, something that was accountable. We delivered a plan, as we always do, that is in stark contrast to what the government has done, because we know their track record. We know the track record of the Liberal government in managing important files. We see it each and every day in this place. It's too important to absolve yourself of that responsibility.

What we proposed has been very well articulated and very well presented. As we move further through the legislative process, we will be able to contrast what your ORPP—Ontario Retirement Pension Plan—will look like and what the New Democrat plan would look like, which would be universal, which would be defined-benefit and which would absolutely end up with the end goal of providing retirement security where there is a vacuum from the federal government.

What we've seen—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Let's change the federal government.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: And we will. We're working, of course, towards the month of October to change the federal government.

You're doing this for a reason. You're doing this because you see that there is a need. But don't take half-measures. Where is this big Liberal government, big

Liberal vision that we used to hear so much of, the old days of the Liberals where they planned ahead, they had focus and they were big thinkers?

This is outsourcing your thought pattern. This is outsourcing any planning and it's abdicating responsibility instead of entrusting yourselves and those around you and the good work of the public service that has experience in this. It's heading to Bay Street to get your experience and to get policy, Speaker, where we don't think it's in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Daïene Vernile: I'd like to thank the member for Essex for his comments on the ORPP. I would like to add my voice to this discussion today. The member for Essex did make some very positive comments on this proposed bill, in particular his comments on how our federal government should be playing a more prominent role. They, of course, should have beefed up the CPP. We have numerous provinces across Canada that have asked for the same thing, but in the absence of that, we are stepping forward. We are showing leadership and we are presenting this bill.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, this plan was part of the platform that we did run on last year. We won a majority mandate from Ontarians. This is an issue that concerns them very much. You also saw this again in our 2014 budget, which was passed in the House last July.

We know that retirement security is a top issue for Ontarians across the province. I can tell you that when I was knocking on doors in my riding, Kitchener Centre—and I counted; I knocked on 7,500 doors—I had lots of discussions with people about this very issue. That was over the course of 43 days. People were telling me that they're concerned not only about their retirement but also for their children and their grandchildren.

I can tell you also that the associate minister, while she was meeting with individuals, associations, businesses and labour, heard repeatedly how people are concerned that they may not have enough money on which to retire and that they might even outlive their retirement.

Without taking action today, many of today's workers are going to face a decline in their living standard in retirement, and that has the potential to stagnate our growth and create economic uncertainty well into the future. That is not good for business, for people or for our economy, and that's why we are taking action, addressing this important issue for now and far into the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is with grave disappointment that I rise today to debate the Ontario pension plan. This Liberal government has the audacity to tell everyday Ontarians to send them more money for benefits that they may not ever, ever derive any benefit from.

Mr. Todd Smith: When will it end?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: When will it end, Speaker?

This is a job-killing payroll tax which, by the government's own admission, will cause at least 55,000 private

sector jobs in the province of Ontario to be lost. In addition to that, as I've stated, there will be virtually few benefits derived by any senior who is living today and possibly even by my generation. Because I can tell you one thing: If this is a government that you cannot trust with Ornge, if this is a government that you cannot trust with eHealth, if this is a government that you can't trust at the OLG, or even to manage a by-election in Sudbury, why would you ask this Liberal government to look after your pension, your future, your security for retirement?

If there's one government in the country of Canada that can get pension planning right, it is the federal government under Stephen Harper that can get this right, by extending our ability for TFSAs.

I think, as do members of the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus, that the best people to save for my retirement and for your retirement and my constituents' retirements are the people of this province. It certainly is not Kathleen Wynne and her Liberal government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd just like to remind the member that we don't call people by their first or last name. We refer to them by their title; in this case, it would be "the Premier." Thank you.

1720

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker. I can just say this in my final seconds: Stephen Harper 1; Kathleen Wynne 0.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always entertaining in this House to follow the member from Nepean—Carleton. Sometimes we agree; sometimes we disagree. I have to disagree with much of what she just said because we in the third party do not see this as a tax.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It is.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No. If this is a tax, then the Canada Pension Plan is a tax, and I do not believe that you think the Canada Pension Plan is a tax.

You like to say what a great job your Conservative cousins are doing on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. But it's your Conservative cousins on Parliament Hill in Ottawa who took the normal average retirement age of 65 and raised it to 67. That is wrong; dead wrong. What should be done is, your Conservative cousins in Ottawa should bring it back down. If it's 65, then bring it down below 65. Don't leave it at 67. Don't call this a tax. This is not a tax.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm going to call it a tax.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: You can call it what you want. I think that most people in Ontario, most people in this Legislature, don't see this as a tax. They see it somewhat as a necessity because, as we know, most of the people in Ontario don't have a pension plan or don't have a very good pension plan. I agree with option A: Increase the CPP. Whatever party, and I hope it's the New Democrats and Tom Mulcair, forms the next government in Canada in October, I think they're going to fix the CPP problem.

Interjection.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I don't think it's going to be a Conservative government, because they have smashed the CPP by putting people up to 67. They should enhance the CPP, Speaker; then we would not be here arguing this today. The problem would be fixed in Ottawa.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments. The member from Ottawa South.

Interjection: Say something nice, John.

Mr. John Fraser: I'll try.

It's always hard to follow the member from Nepean—Carleton and the member from Windsor—Tecumseh in succession. I do have to say that I wholeheartedly agree with you, except for the Tom Mulcair part. It is not a tax.

I think that the member from Windsor—Essex and I share the fact that enhancing the CPP is probably the single most important thing the current federal government could do to help Canadians—the single most important thing. The real fact of the matter is that they won't even talk about thinking about doing it. What they're saying is, "We don't think that that's necessary." I believe that that's wrong. I believe most people in this Legislature in all parties know that.

I very much appreciated the comments from the member from Nepean—Carleton and her passion and her fervour. I would like to suggest that she use that passion and fervour to engage her federal cousins in that discussion and debate. It could be helpful.

The member from Windsor—Essex said earlier that we haven't been working hard enough. It's pretty hard when the finance minister says, "That's a problem for our grandchildren." Climate change: "That's a problem for our grandchildren." How do you talk to people like that? How do you talk to people who don't believe that we have some responsibility to those people who come after us? How do you have that conversation?

The member from Essex: I appreciate his comments very much. I don't agree with all of them.

Getting back to the track record, I'll say 4 and 0. That's the track record. That's not said in a cocky way. I just want to say that we have got a lot of things right, and we've worked very hard.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Essex for his final comments.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Thanks, of course, to the member from Nepean—Carleton, to the member from Windsor—Tecumseh and to the member from Ottawa South.

The issue of pensions is not a new one for New Democrats. In fact, in this country, we practically invented the whole mechanism of public pensions here, one that is in place and has been in place for so long. I challenge you to make any overtures, whether provincial or federal, to dismantle what is our universal Canada Pension Plan.

Why does it work? Because it makes sense. It's something that provides that security. Why does it make sense? Because we did it right. The provisions built into

the Canada Pension Plan were right. Of course, the federal government, under Stephen Harper, has been attempting to dismantle, as the Republicans in the United States, the Tea Partiers, will attempt to dismantle—

Applause.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Don't applaud, Minister, because you're in the same realm. You are one penny on that side of the fence. You do not have the moral courage or fortitude to enact the provisions that will afford for retirement security. You listen too much to your Bay Street buddies. They influence your party too much in the policies that you bring to this House.

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: To give your head a shake is something that I think is an appropriate response, because that is what your government has done and continues to do.

If you had the courage, you would look at some of the plans that we've put forward in the amendments to this bill. Unfortunately, you can't, because you play both sides of the fence. It is where you lie ideologically; I will not fault you for that. But I'll tell you, when it does end up being a failure in policy and doesn't deliver the results that you're looking for, you will have to look in the mirror and say: "We could have done more. We should have done more. We should have listened to the NDP the whole time."

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please. Further debate.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 56 and put a proper perspective on things. Again, just to revisit, Bill 56 is called the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2015. As many of my colleagues have already made very clear, I just want to reiterate the fact that we are not supporting this particular bill, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act.

In part, we feel that we need to trust Ontarians to get it right and trust them to save for their own retirement. Definitely, this is important because we do not have any trust in this Liberal government. They are forever dipping their hands into Ontarians' pockets.

Just yesterday, we were seeing very clearly that they're doing everything within their majority power to eliminate oversight. We could talk about that to a great extent, but I want to talk to the fact that, just moments ago, we heard from both the NDP and the Liberals that this is not a payroll tax. Well, Speaker, I have to tell you that I reached out to the small businesses in my riding, and I will touch specifically on a letter that was sent back to me that is totally to the contrary.

Where will businesses be able to find an additional 1.9% revenue to support their mandatory contributions to the ORPP when we have the highest North American hydro rates, as well as a government that is choosing to continue to pump up the rates as of May 1? It's going up a whopping 15%, and that's not acceptable—up to 16 cents per kilowatt hour during peak production.

Hon. James J. Bradley: You're making that up.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: No, we cannot make this up. Sadly, people are afraid of what it's going to take to actually survive this Liberal government.

Let's go back to the payroll tax, to be specific. Employees will see less money in their pockets, and as I mentioned before, employers' cost of business will go up.

Internal government documents have warned that the province will lose 18,000 jobs for every \$2 billion collected. It will hurt people who live paycheque to paycheque.

Coming back to hydro rates, even municipalities now are writing to LDCs, saying, "Please, stop cutting hydro off during winter months." You know there's a problem across Ontario when this is happening.

Again, the more you lose in payroll tax from both the employee and employer side of the business, there's less take-home pay for groceries and rent, and ultimately fewer jobs.

1730

It's policies like this Liberal one that hold Ontario back and, as I said before, drive jobs away. That's why, in part, when I reflect on this bill and compare it to Bill 57, we were supportive of Bill 57. My colleague from York-Simcoe did a wonderful job explaining the difference between Bill 57 and Bill 56. I sum it up by saying: You know what? It's good to support Bill 57, the pooled pension plans that are mobile, because guess what, Speaker? We are losing more and more people out of this province every day, and at least Bill 57 allows them to take their pensions with them.

Again, the difference between 57 and 56 in terms of bills is that Bill 56 will hurt people who live paycheque to paycheque and its policies are going to see further skyrocketing energy rates from this Liberal government. We have policies that are introducing new taxes. We have policies from this government that are introducing crushing red tape. Sadly, it almost seems like this is becoming the norm. But what can never, ever be the norm in this province is the gouging of Ontario's taxpayers. I would dare say that the PC Party of Ontario is the only party that stands up for both business and taxpayers.

Let's think about this a little bit further. All of the Liberal norms that are coming at us left, right and centre are making a very unattractive climate for businesses to come to Ontario. I meet with stakeholders day in and day out, and they're saying it's becoming a great worry because the stability of Ontario, which once catapulted this province to be the economic engine of Confederation, is actually weakening every time they turn around. It's scaring businesses to look on the other side of the border.

Another example of driving people out of this province would be the additional tax on aviation fuel, but that can be a discussion for another day.

Going back to the ORPP, we're seeing the policies to be very irresponsible. Something that mimics irresponsible policies is the carbon tax known as cap and trade. Again, we're seeing all of this nonsense come out of the

Liberal government that is making it tougher to be in Ontario every day.

When I was first elected MPP for Huron–Bruce, I set out to stand up for the taxpayers of this province. Unfortunately, over the last three and a half years, I have seen time and again fiscal mismanagement and scandals and, ultimately, hardship for Ontarians. That is the norm of the Liberal government. They have scandal after scandal. They mismanage files like eHealth. They introduce taxes that do not go to help front-line health care, such as the health premium tax; it just goes into general coffers. It's just another example of how they gouge and gouge, and Ontarians are becoming exhausted. All of these new taxes the Liberals are implementing are crippling our economy, and it makes it harder to live, work and raise a family.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has come out strongly against the proposed ORPP on behalf of their members, stating that 86% of small business owners surveyed did not support the plan. What's more concerning is that 69% of these owners would freeze or cut salaries, and 53% would reduce their number of employees if the plan was implemented.

When is this government going to wake up? They have destroyed this province, and they seem to be enjoying stomping all over hard-working Ontarians.

In terms of driving out of Ontario, another fact that can't be overlooked is that given the misplaced policies and their desperate attempts to grab onto tax whenever possible, we've seen 300,000 manufacturing jobs leave this province. Most recently, in eastern Ontario, we just heard that Goodyear is going to be closing up shop as well. It's just the most recent example of how the Premier's government is making it unattractive for business to come and confidently stay in this province, which is a very, very sad state of affairs.

And you know what? It doesn't stop there. This is the worrisome part. This government is so cash-strapped, they're reaching and pulling at every possible little thread in that pocket of the Ontario taxpayer, because as you know, later this fall, we're going to learn more about a disastrous attempt to tax everything in this province. That policy, that program, is coined as cap and trade, but we know the reality is it's a carbon tax. It's a tax on everything.

You could also suggest that on the flipside of the coin, it's an opportunity for carbon polluters to pay to pollute. So it's not going to derive the result that everybody needs, which is ultimately a reduction of emissions.

Going back to the carbon tax for one more second, many groups have raised concerns with the carbon tax implementation, including the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, who—

Ms. Daiene Vernile: A point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I recognize the member from Kitchener Centre on a point of order.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: The intention of the debate right now is supposed to be about the ORPP, not what the member is discussing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. I've been listening carefully and she is bringing it around. I'll just remind the member to ensure that we are, in fact, addressing the bill.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, and I am coming back around to it because it's an example of how this government continues to introduce failed policy and disastrous stress on the burdens of Ontarians.

I just wanted to point out that the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters expressed that "it will also be critical that Ontario not act unilaterally. Failure to act in parallel on a North American basis" with regard to a carbon tax "would put Ontario manufacturers at a significant competitive disadvantage." That is the common thread that I wanted to touch on: Ontarians indeed are at a disadvantage, even with this ORPP.

I have been a strong advocate against implementing a carbon tax, which will inevitably increase the cost of everything, as I said, and contribute to losing high-paying jobs. It's a rather rich irony here, Speaker, because what's going to happen here is—this government is cash-strapped, so it's introducing an ORPP to generate a new stream of revenue. But guess what? They're going to be driving so many jobs out of this province because of their other ill-conceived notions and taxes. Again, they're going to fall flat and fail. It's going to be a go, let me tell you that.

This government guesses that gas will increase, with a carbon tax, by three cents—another stress on business and on our taxpayers. Add that to the ORPP, and there's yet another finger digging into that pocket.

In rural and northern Ontario, I have to say, we don't have a lot of options to commute to jobs. We need jobs in our small towns. I just can't stress enough that the only option after a mandatory ORPP comes into place in small-town Ontario is for employers to try to save as much money as possible. This job tax is going to come directly out of their bottom line, and there's not a lot of line left, if you will, Speaker. Because of that, we are going to see further erosion of our small towns.

Because of this, families are going to be feeling it the most. Families are the ones that don't have the opportunity to pick up and move, go across to the States or go out west, because they've got their roots planted in Ontario, and they're going to struggle. They really don't have any alternatives.

In terms of alternatives, it's frustrating when you think about the five budget asks that we presented to the Ontario Liberal government. We presented alternatives for them to consider to rein in their spending and to make life a little bit easier for Ontarians. Simply, the five items that we presented were all reasonable, sensible solutions to the challenges Ontarians are facing today. Sadly, the Liberal government turns a blind eye. They don't care about sensible solutions. They know they're cash-strapped, and they're just going to dig as far as they can, with new taxes and new regulations that ultimately have negative effects.

Sadly, none of our suggestions were taken into consideration. I just want to review them so that the Ontario

taxpayer knows that it was the PC Party that truly was standing up for them. Simply, one of our suggestions was to cancel the carbon tax. Another was to cancel the ORPP to ensure business can and will grow in Ontario.

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However, instead of allowing business to grow, the government decided instead to move forward and force employers to compensate for the higher costs with fewer employees. The ORPP will force employers, as I said, to raise prices and cut staff—the list goes on and on. Employers will have to reduce their workforce, as I mentioned, because they can't afford future wage increases. This is not what businesses want in Ontario.

In my riding of Huron–Bruce, small business is big business. It accounts for thousands of jobs and our revenue in our communities. I really commend a bright group of people that have been pulled together by the county of Huron into a Huron county economic development board. They want young people to come back to jobs in our county of Huron. They want people to flourish and bring in jobs to keep people, specifically young people, in our riding. You know what? They're frustrated because, at every turn, Liberals continue to introduce new taxes and new policies that strip them of their enthusiasm and their entrepreneurial spirit; it's like one step forward and five back. Hurting the job creators is the last thing this province needs right now.

The pension worry is shared, as I said, by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which actually represents, as I've mentioned before—and this is important to remember—97% of small businesses.

Mr. Todd Smith: The chamber of commerce doesn't like it.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: No, the chamber of commerce doesn't like it either. That's right. We need to be doing everything we can to make it easier.

Ontario is becoming less and less competitive. I want to share with you a letter that I received from one of the businesses in my riding. Again, it's interesting: Just moments ago, we heard from both the third party and the governing party that the ORPP is not a tax. Well, after I read this letter, even small business calls it a tax, and it's something that everybody needs to tune into.

Mr. Todd Smith: Let's hear it. Tell us.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "Hi Lisa,

"I saw your letter to business owners through the Saugeen Shores chamber. I just want to add my thoughts. I have no problem with an optional retirement plan being developed that allows employees to decide"—if they can contribute, if they can afford to contribute or even want to contribute. An optional initiative would also allow "business owners to easily submit the deductions on behalf of the employees.

"What I do have an issue with is the idea of something becoming 'mandatory' and of the planned requirement for employer contributions. The more employers have to contribute on top of salary, the smaller the salaries are going to be. I can share that I have been keeping wages somewhat lower out of concern that once such a plan

goes in, I will be required to pay that much more for the same employee for the same hour. Every time employers are required to submit additional funds of their own, it just feels like a tax"—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It is a tax.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a tax for hiring people.

"I think the intended approach puts job creation at risk—both from what I hear from other business owners and how I myself view it. I sincerely hope that the proposal as it stands does not go forward.

"I did not vote for the Liberals in the last election, largely on the basis of not wanting this to go through."

Her name is Karen; she's lead counsel at Jacques Law, Litigation, Dispute Resolution and Workplace Safety Law, in Kincardine.

Speaker, this isn't the only correspondence I've received in this regard. Another constituent wrote me on behalf of his company, Edward Fuels, expressing his dissatisfaction with the impending mandatory Liberal Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and its implications for small business. He went on to explain that "the definition of a 'comparable' retirement plan has become a source of contention, with many plans not being considered within the 'exemption' guidelines." Needless to say, it is quite clear that businesses in my riding and across this province are not supportive of the ORPP.

Speaker, this is where I need to challenge the government of the day. Facts speak for themselves, and I worry that this government is not consulting. We saw it with the carbon tax. We saw it with the neonics. They have not consulted time and again. Even with Bill 45, I was asking stakeholders who had taken time to create and provide submissions and to come forward to testify—I asked them, "Did this government reach out to you regarding Bill 45?" They said, "No. They did not consult with us." It's a trend that's infuriating. It's time that this government wakes up and starts working with Ontarians as opposed to dictating tax after tax after tax.

This Liberal government claims that people are not saving enough for their retirement. Well, for goodness' sakes, people can't save enough because they're taking every possible quarter and penny out of their pocket through tax after tax after tax.

From 1990 to 2008, Ontario had the highest saving rate of all provinces in Canada. Currently, Ontario sits at the national average. The people who are struggling in pension years are often single, elderly individuals who have never worked and only receive 60% of their spouse's CPP. These people are on limited resources, yet this government keeps driving the cost of living up, not giving a hoot about how people are trying to scrape just to get by. This is unacceptable. Sadly enough, this new tax that's going to drive up the cost of groceries and drive up the cost of doing business is going to cause them to experience more expense when they're already finding it tough to make ends meet. It's unacceptable.

If this government had a more accountable and transparent energy policy as well as tax policy, and opened themselves up to consultation to see, really and

truly, how hard-hit Ontarians are today in 2015, maybe—just maybe—they would actually slow down on their tax-and-spend ways.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: One of the things I agree on with my colleague from the Conservative Party is that people are finding it very difficult to make ends meet. That's definitely a problem, and we need to address it. How is this budget doing that?

First and foremost, we have to address the fact that this government has very loudly and very boldly declared that they were a progressive government. During their budget, they discussed the fact that they were a progressive government. If we look at what they're doing in the budget and we look at what they're doing with pensions, it's very interesting if we look at their priorities. First and foremost, they have a privatization agenda. They have an agenda around cutting services.

With respect to the pension plan: When we absolutely need a pension plan, we absolutely need a plan that assists people to live in dignity as they age and we need to ensure that people are able to retire with grace, we're seeing this government's priorities. The government has prioritized a particular form of retirement plan which is going to benefit bankers and Bay Street, but they're not prioritizing a plan that would actually benefit day-to-day workers in giving them a guaranteed and reliable source of income.

There is a very interesting approach that this government is taking. They're prioritizing and moving very quickly to implement a plan that is not reliable, that is going to be subject to the whim of the markets, and they're moving very slowly on a plan that would be more reliable, on a plan that actually would benefit the workers of Ontario, that would actually benefit Ontarians. This priority is something we want to question. Is this government truly acting in a progressive manner when they are not putting enough attention into the type of pension that would actually benefit people in a meaningful way but instead are looking to assist some of their, perhaps, friends in the banking and financial sector that might benefit from the other sort of pension plan? That's something we need to look at.

I think what we're seeing very clearly is that this government is not the progressive government they've made themselves out to be.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I, first of all, want to congratulate the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton on being chosen as the deputy leader. All this time, I thought the member for Kitchener–Waterloo was the deputy leader of the New Democratic Party, and now I find out it's the best-dressed member in the Legislature himself, the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton. But he did have some appropriate comments about the previous speaker.

My goal is to bring the Conservative Party into the 21st century. I suggested the 19th century; I was cor-

rected. A member for southwestern Ontario, who will go unnamed, suggested it was really the 20th century that they're in because they're anti-environment. If you have any environmental issues—all the questions that come in around the environment. They're anti-pension plan. They're anti-anything that's progressive.

1750

So I don't know why they have the name—you may wonder about this, Mr. Speaker; you're neutral in the Chair. Why would they have the name "Progressive Conservative" anymore? I remember when the member for Renfrew South, the father of the present member from Barry's Bay, was here. It was genuinely a Progressive Conservative Party at that time. Now we find it's deteriorated considerably into a Tea Party rump. Back to this—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Back to the actual comments that were made. Everybody in this House, I think, agrees that this matter could be best addressed if we had a progressive federal government which would enhance the CPP. They're not prepared to do that, so on behalf of working people in this province, we are putting this forward. We think it will be beneficial.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm pleased to join the debate this afternoon. The speaker from Huron–Bruce was absolutely correct when she said that this is a tax. I know that's something that this government doesn't want to admit.

What was most ludicrous last week after the budget was delivered, Mr. Speaker, was when the Premier stood up and said that this was a budget that didn't include any tax, that there were no tax increases in this budget. There are at least five I can count in this budget. There's a new tax on beer. There's a new tax on carbon, which is going to be a tax on everything, gasoline; that's called the cap-and-trade, which is included in the budget. The aviation fuel tax is going up in the province. Of course, don't forget about this payroll tax in the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. It's a tax on every business, and it's a tax on all the employees at those businesses as well: 1.9%. Businesses can't afford it.

You know why the federal government won't increase the CPP? It's because of this pathetic government of the last 12 years in Ontario that's dragging the national economy down because they can't get their act together.

We're bleeding jobs in Ontario, and what does this government do? They want to be a bigger albatross around the neck of Ontario businesses by bringing in more taxes. I cannot believe that this government can't get its head out of the sand and do what's right and start to create jobs in this province, not try and do everything they can to drive them out of the province.

The ORPP is a payroll tax—bottom line. There's no question about it. We used to call Dalton "the Tax Man;" I'm not exactly sure what we're going to call Kathleen Wynne, the new Premier, but we'll come up with some moniker. Bottom line—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd just like to remind the member from Prince Edward–Hastings that when you refer to people by first and last name, it's not acceptable. We must refer to them by their title; therefore, the reference would be to the Premier.

Further questions and comments.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Well, Speaker, I guess we're getting late in the day. I don't know if the pages were handing out Valium earlier, but if they did, they missed one of our members. Maybe it's time that we all just chilled out a little bit in the House this afternoon.

I rise on behalf of the people who sent me from Windsor–Tecumseh to make comments on Bill 56. I know the member for Huron–Bruce was also talking about Bill 56 and Bill 57. I don't mind Bill 56; Bill 57, personally, I don't like. It's sort of like, "We don't have enough money to put into RRSPs on our own, so we'll put it in a pooled plan, the Bill 57 plan, and pay big commissions to the bankers and the insurance companies, and hope that the market doesn't crash and we're left with nothing." So I do have some problems with that.

But I must admire the passion that the member for Huron–Bruce brings to her debates in this House. Sometimes she's moved to tears because of the passion of representing the people of Huron–Bruce, especially when it comes to the wind farms and other obstacles in her riding.

Interjections.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'm not sure what the member from Nepean–Carleton is saying at the moment, if it had something to do with the Ottawa Senators losing last night or if it was something about the Go, Habs, go! sign she held up earlier. She does have interjections when we speak to this bill, Speaker, Bill 56—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I remind the member that we are talking about this bill and not anything else.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. At this hour of the day, I think the debate is winding down, just as it is winding down in this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Huron–Bruce for final comments.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I appreciate the spirited comments from the members from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, St. Catharines, Prince Edward–Hastings and Windsor–Tecumseh.

You know, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh said that sometimes you can be brought to tears in this House. Certainly the people who are going to be crying after the ORPP comes into fruition will be small businesses across Ontario, because time and again, we're trying to get through to this government once and for all that they just can't handle any more tax stress.

I wanted to wrap up by sharing some comments from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They went on to say that it's clear that this proposal, as it stands now, not only undermines existing retirement savings, but it would force additional contributions on a large segment of the population who—you know what?—really can't afford it. Again, coming back to the chamber, their main concerns

are: increased costs for businesses—that there is not actually an undersaving problem in the province; we have an overspending government, Speaker.

Another concern that the chamber noted was that the clawbacks to Old Age Security and guaranteed income security will have negative effects on Ontario's poor. They also mentioned that there will be many unintended consequences of the ORPP, including layoffs, hiring freezes and cancellation of other retirement programs. They noted that the current retirement programs already provide more in savings than the ORPP ever will and that the definition of "comparable" is far too restrictive. Again, I'll repeat that: that the definition of "comparable" is too restrictive.

And, like everything else this Liberal government does, there's no economic analysis of the pension plan. That happens time and time again. This Liberal government does not take the time to do a cost-benefit analysis on any initiative or tax that they introduce, and they never consult. As a result, we're going to continue to spiral downwards.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank all members for a lively debate this afternoon.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

RETAIL ALCOHOL SALES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Leeds–Grenville has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Premier. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant to the Premier may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to again highlight the inequity at the heart of this government's beer sales reform plan.

In my question to the Premier last week, I said that her motivation is obvious. Giving licences to 450 grocery stores to stock beer is just a distraction—what we call in political circles a channel changer. It's designed to take the public's attention off the real problems a government faces. In this case, this government needs a lot of channel changers because there are so many problems.

But it really says something about their incompetence when they can't even manage a channel changer properly. That's because their beer sales plan shuts out every Ontarian in a rural community or a small town or city. No grocery store in a community with a population under 30,000 can bid on a licence. Rural Ontario loses out again with this government.

I'm glad the parliamentary assistant to the Premier is here. I want him to explain to the people of Leeds–

Grenville why they're good enough to pay your \$100-million beer tax but get none of your licences. That's the fundamental inequity that we've got here today. You're digging deeper into our pockets, but we're getting nothing in return. It's like it's happy hour for your tax-and-spend cabinet but not for the people that I represent.

1800

This isn't about the convenience of picking up a six-pack at the grocery store; it's about economic development, job creation and the viability of our rural communities.

I know it's hard for this government to understand, but not everyone in Ontario happens to live in a city of over 30,000. I welcome the member for Etobicoke North to come to Leeds–Grenville this summer. We can take a tour, and I can show you the great things that are happening in my small communities. Maybe then he'll understand why entrepreneurs in those communities are so frustrated with this plan: They can compete with any business anywhere in the province, but the Premier says they can't because their store is located in the wrong part of Ontario.

In the question, I mentioned Neil Kudrinko, owner of Kudrinko's Fresh Mart in Westport. Neil and I have talked many times about the great opportunity a licence would create for his store. It would make it more of a destination for customers seeking a unique shopping experience. This man is an innovative forward-thinker. He's an award winner, and I know that he knows how to make his community prosper. Neil can't expand and hire new staff. It's little wonder he described the government's plan as "a mess from day one" in a local newspaper article.

I also mentioned what a licence would mean to Lynn Laming, owner of Kitley Grocery in Toledo. After asking my question, I heard from Greg Williams, a neighbour of Lynn's shop. He wrote to me and said how shocked he was at the Premier's response and how little she knows about rural Ontario. Here's what Greg wrote:

"She stated she did not want them in the rural areas because it may cause the Beer Store to close down. Has she ever been to a rural Beer Store? My closest Beer Store is Smiths Falls, 21 kilometres away, next Brockville, 29 kilometres away.

"How would Kitley Grocery, if given the right to sell beer, have much of an effect on these stores closing?"

Greg is right. The competition wouldn't close Beer Stores or LCBOs. The Premier's response is a smoke-screen.

And it's not just rural communities in my riding being left with an empty mug. The same day I asked my question, it was reported that the Beer Store in downtown Brockville is closing at year's end. I'm hoping that the city's economic development department will work with me and TBS to find a new downtown location. But here's the point: In the comment section of the online story, people said it's no big deal because the Metro grocery store up the street will soon be selling beer. Well, these folks are in for a shock, because it's not going to happen.

Brockville's population is under 30,000, so the Premier says we don't make the grade.

Premier Wynne claims I want to hand a licence to every store in the province. She's wrong, and I hope her PA won't use that nonsense in his talking points today. What I want is a fair system for those 450 licences. What I want is respect for entrepreneurs and consumers. It's a far better recipe for success than allowing governments to pick winners and losers.

This is a very fundamental question for the parliamentary assistant. It's a question of fairness for rural Ontario. So I ask the Premier's parliamentary assistant to put away his talking points, save some time and make a simple commitment to me and members on this side of the House: Tell them you'll stop playing postal code politics with your beer sales plan. Please go back to the drawing board, come up with a level playing field, and let's grow the economy in every corner of Ontario.

I look forward to the parliamentary assistant's answer to my questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Over to the parliamentary assistant to the Premier.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it is past the witching hour of 6 p.m. I commend all the individuals who are here as the core group of Parliament: you in the chair; the honourable Steve Clark, House leader of the opposition party; Mr. Edward Ashimi, our cruise director in the corner over there.

I will take you, sir, at your word—the sincerity and the intensity that you deliver it. I think this place is a place where we can agree to respectfully disagree. I will accept your call, your challenge; I will aspire not to use nonsense. Perhaps it will be judged either in the press or by your committee team tomorrow whether it was or was not nonsense, but I hope whatever remarks I'm about to offer—I'm not generally in the habit of offering nonsense unless, I suppose, that's the goal.

Having said that, I would simply also say that our values, perhaps, our feelings, our research on it, what we want to do for the province of Ontario, differ from you, and I think that, of course, plays itself out on a daily basis, whether it's in question period or elsewhere.

As for your call or your invitation to come to Leeds–Grenville, I think it's very much the process and procedure of this place that any bill that is contentious, that has geographic specificity, that may not play well in Peoria, that has a different rural or urban split—those types of bills do travel.

Having travelled all across this province, perhaps not as rurally as you would like, but as, for example, Chair of the justice policy committee, Chair of social policy—always, by the way, more or less, I think, as Chair, since I've been here, 12 or 13 years, I have travelled endlessly across Ontario. Hopefully, I think, at least some of those areas were, in fact, rural.

Monsieur le Président, notre gouvernement est fier d'avoir introduit une initiative représentant le changement le plus marquant dans la vente d'alcool en Ontario depuis près de 90 ans. Nous avons écouté les consommateurs et

leur offrons plus de choix et de flexibilité. Ces changements sont le reflet de ce que les Ontariens veulent. This change reflects what Ontarians want.

Pour la première fois dans l'histoire de l'Ontario, la bière sera vendue dans les épiceries—450 nouveaux points de vente, 150 d'ici le 1^{er} mai 2017. En gros, il s'agit du même nombre de Beer Store en opération aujourd'hui.

De plus, nous allons mener des projets pilotes dans 10 magasins LCBO où des caisses de 12 bières seront mises en vente—450 new locations, 150 stores by May 1, 2017. That's roughly the same number of Beer Store outlets that exist today. In addition, in 10 LCBO stores we'll run pilots where 12-packs can be sold.

En étendant la vente de bière aux épiceries, nous offrons plus de choix et plus de flexibilité aux consommateurs.

Le processus final pour l'obtention des licences ou autres permissions comportera différentes considérations, incluant de s'assurer d'une valeur équitable pour les clients, répondre à la demande le mieux possible, s'assurer d'une compétition juste, éviter la trop grande concentration et servir les communautés à travers la province, tout en continuant d'adhérer aux principes de responsabilité sociale.

The final process for awarding licences or other permissions will balance a host of considerations, including how to secure good value, best meet demands, ensure fair competition, avoid undue concentration and serve communities across the province, rural as well as urban.

It's something I support, not only as the parliamentary assistant to the Premier, not only as the Chair of justice policy, not only as the representative of Etobicoke North, but also, of course, in my capacity as a physician: adhering to the principles of social responsibility.

I appreciate that the table officers are appreciating my remarks as well.

Ceci permet au Beer Store de revenir plus près de ses racines de coopérative en s'ouvrant davantage à tous les brasseurs ayant des établissements de production en Ontario et en intégrant mieux les intérêts de parties prenantes clés, incluant les brasseurs—petits et grands—les restaurants, les propriétaires de bars, et, évidemment, les consommateurs de bière.

Speaker, it's a deep issue. The remarks are only five minutes. We look forward to doing more in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Since there are no further late shows, this House is deemed adjourned until tomorrow at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1809.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Samia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cookville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Kiwaal, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
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Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
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Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre
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Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
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		Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Mileczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
		Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
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Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
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Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
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Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
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		Premier / Première ministre
		Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
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Grant Crack, Cheri DiNovo
Han Dong, Michael Harris
Randy Hillier, Sophie Kiwala
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Peter Z. Milczyn, Daiene Vernile
Soo Wong
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Mike Colle, Grant Crack
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Wayne Gates, Marie-France Lalonde
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Lorenzo Berardinetti, Bob Delaney
Jack MacLaren, Michael Mantha
Cristina Martins, Indira Naidoo-Harris
Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qadri
Todd Smith
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Garfield Dunlop
Granville Anderson, Bas Balkissoon
Chris Ballard, Toby Barrett
Garfield Dunlop, Michael Mantha
Eleanor McMahon, Laurie Scott
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Han Dong, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Julia Munro, Arthur Potts
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Kathryn McGarry
Robert Bailey, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Jennifer K. French, Monte Kwinter
Amrit Mangat, Kathryn McGarry
Indira Naidoo-Harris, Daiene Vernile
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Vic Dhillon
Christine Elliott, Marie-France Lalonde
Amrit Mangat, Gila Martow
Kathryn McGarry, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment / Comité spécial de la violence et du harcèlement à caractère sexuel

Chair / Présidente: Daiene Vernile
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Han Dong, Randy Hillier
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
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Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
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No. 76

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 29 April 2015

Mercredi 29 avril 2015



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 29 April 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 29 avril 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE RÉGIME DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 28, 2015, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 56, Loi exigeant l'établissement du Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House and add my remarks today on Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. It's an act that we are in favour of, in principle, although we have some grave reservations about whether or not this government could actually create something like this without scandal and wasting people's money.

I come from a long line of farmers, and we have, as personal history, very little experience with pensions, because farmers are self-employed and usually pass the farm on from generation to generation, and somehow in that passage, we support the former generation, as I did when I bought my dad's farm, and we still do that. My mom would not be able to survive on CPP. So as part of when I bought the farm, we make a payment every month, and that's part of my mom's pension. Without that, she would have a very hard time making it. So we do have a true, deep feeling for people who have to rely on CPP. It's not enough. I think we can all agree on that in this House.

There are people who don't need a better pension system than we have now. They've done well for themselves, and that's all fine and good. But there are people in our society who need help from a pension system. I think that we in this House can all agree that the best way to move forward would be an enhanced CPP. The federal system seems to work well; it does work well. I think we can all agree that that is the best way to move forward.

The federal government has made it very clear that they don't want to move forward on this—perhaps sometime in the future. Perhaps the federal finance minister would also like to leave that to Stephen Harper's granddaughter to figure out. That's the part about pensions that is very important.

The provincial Conservatives keep calling this a tax, as do the federal Conservatives. In its essence, it's not a tax. But, as an employer, I can see why an employer might view it as such, because there is a point that it is a cost of doing business. If your business is already being stretched to the limit by extremely high hydro costs—or, as in northern Ontario, many businesses need natural gas and they have no access to natural gas—or taxes—so it is an extra cost of doing business. As an employer, there's no doubt of that.

As a society, we have to look forward, to make sure that as people reach retirement age—as our population ages, there are going to be more people reaching retirement age. It's our duty, as the Legislature, to look forward to that. Governments are always accused of not looking far enough into the future. They're just looking for the election cycle. It is a government's job to look further than the election cycle.

The federal Conservatives have decided, "No, no, we don't want to enhance the CPP." So the provincial Liberals have decided to, again, introduce Bill 56. Basically, this is an act to create an Ontario defined benefit pension plan.

While we support this one in principle—the Liberals have also confused the whole situation by introducing several bills, one a defined benefit, and one a pooled pension, which is not much different to us than current RRSPs. So they're muddying the situation, in our opinion.

Also, the biggest question is whether this government has the fiscal responsibility to actually administer this plan in the way it that should be administered. For that—one of the reasons why we question that—I'd like to go to Bill 91, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts.

One of the acts that's being amended—if you'll give me a minute, Speaker, to find it—I even highlighted it. This is from the explanatory notes from An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts, Bill 91, the budget bill.

In schedule 5, for the Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act: "An amendment to subsection 3(2) of the Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act, 2014 provides that the act does not apply to the Ontario

Retirement Pension Plan Administration Corporation and its subsidiaries.”

That’s very important, because one thing this government has been not very good at is actually controlling very high public sector—for example, CEO—salaries or arm’s-length corporations like Ornge. They’ve brought in the Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act, 2014, and said, “This is our answer. This creates the framework—no hard caps, but it does create the framework.” And here in the budget bill that has just been introduced, they’re exempting the pension plan from that framework. Again, that’s part of the problem.

The best thing to do would be to have this rolled into the CPP, which the federal Conservatives don’t want to do. That way, you wouldn’t have to create another whole bureaucracy and another whole board. To create a successful pension plan, you’re going to need very qualified people, who are, no doubt, worth a lot of money. But, again, this act exempts us from finding out exactly how much money. If this is a public pension plan, it should be open and transparent. But we know the one thing that this government has a problem with is openness and transparency.

My father always told me that if someone has to tell you they’re honest, then deep down, they’re not that honest. And if a government has to keep telling you that they’re open and transparent, they might not be that open and transparent.

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In Bill 91, while we’re creating a defined benefit pension plan—what they’re proposing to create. We’re worried that they’re actually not going to have the due diligence to do this correctly, and here they’re starting out by exempting the pension plan from the Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act. That’s not a very good start for openness and transparency.

There’s one other issue that is a problem. We’ll create a board and we’ll create the corporation, which is not covered by the Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act. But it gets better, Speaker—or worse. In the bill—Bill 56 to create this pension—under Delegation, “The legislation referred to in subsection 1(2) shall contain rules that permit the administrative entity to delegate the authority to perform any of the administrative entity’s functions or to carry out any of the administrative entity’s powers.” So we create a board, we exempt them from the Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act and then we allow this board to delegate powers to another group. This might work very well, or this might become another huge Ornge. That is something we have to find out, going forward. Because, as you know, Ornge risked people’s lives and wasted people’s money, and here, the government wants to create a tool to actually save money for people’s futures, but the delegation of authority and the exemption of public oversight is not a very good way to start.

The third issue—unfortunately, I can’t quote from the act on this, but it’s an issue that’s really a very serious issue to us. If this bill goes ahead and this plan is imple-

mented as it’s written now, this will be kept in a separate pool of funds, which it should be. These funds will be invested, and hopefully, when people who have paid into this reach the age where they can pull out of the plan, there will be money there. That’s basically how this plan is supposed to work. They know how much they’re going to get out. But as has been the case with other governments, once you build up this plan and you have a big whack of money in it—and we know how governments tend to need money, from time to time—there is the danger that the government will try to ease their way into this plan to basically finance the operations, good or bad, of the government.

I’m sure that they, on the other side, are going to comment, “No. That will never happen. This is set in stone.” Our example of why this could very well happen is something else that we’ve owned and built up for 100 years and has been set in stone—can anybody help me? Hydro One. It actually makes the government money, and they’re talking right now about raiding it, dumping it and using it as part of the election cycle. If they get \$4 billion from Hydro One and they’ve promised \$130 billion in transit, selling Hydro One is really a drop in the bucket. The numbers don’t work.

What we really have to be cognizant of, is that they’re going to build up this plan and they’ve shown very well that they’re willing to raid it, because they’re willing to raid Hydro One. Speaker, I’d like to share my time with the member from Welland, but I’d like to end with this. That’s the biggest problem. We support this bill, in principle, but we don’t believe the government actually has the principles to pull it off.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I think this is the second time I’ve had the opportunity to actually speak to this bill. I spoke to it at second reading, and I spent most of my time during second reading talking about what workers really need in this province. Although we do support the ORPP in principle, if you talk to workers across Ontario, they’ll tell you that what they really need is a good job, Speaker. They need a job that makes more than minimum wage. They need a job that has full-time hours. They need a job that actually has some health benefits so that they’re not having to pay for those health care needs out of their pocket. They need enforcement through the employment standards branch and through the occupational health and safety branch to make sure that entitlements that they have under the employment standards are actually enforced. So many of them work overtime in this province. They don’t get their vacation. They don’t get their overtime paid. They don’t get their stat holidays paid. And unfortunately, the enforcement isn’t that great. If they had a decent job with a pension and benefits, they wouldn’t need to participate in this ORPP.

But, Speaker, there’s a lot of pension reform that needs to be done. I know that you talked about it yesterday, the pension guarantee here in the province of Ontario that is only \$1,000. That legislation I think came in

many, many years ago. Today, it certainly doesn't cut it, when we have factories closing across the Niagara region and throughout the province—manufacturing, where people had \$3,000 pensions or \$2,500 pensions. Their company goes under and all of a sudden they see their pension reduced by a third, and then perhaps by another third, and the only guarantee that they have from the province when these companies bail is a thousand bucks—not much to support families.

There are also things that need to be done around part-time workers, even in defined benefit plans and public sector plans across this province. For many years, part-time workers were only able to contribute based on those part-time hours that they were scheduled, regardless of any of the overtime hours that they actually did. So for example in hospitals across this province, if you were a part-time worker working 24 hours a week, normally, but you suddenly worked some overtime and you were working 40 or 50 hours, you were not eligible to contribute on the straight-time portion of those hours. Many part-time nurses in the province were negatively impacted by that, so they don't have whole pensions at the end of the day. That was remedied in the last few years, but for many of them, they'll be negatively impacted for the rest of their lives.

There are also requirements or criteria eligibility in many of the public sector pension plans that you have to work a minimum number of hours in each of two years before you even become eligible. That impacts part-time people, in particular, and that really needs to be fixed as well.

I also want to talk about whether there's going to be an opportunity—we're moving into the PRPPs, where people will be contributing into these pooled registered pension plans. What hasn't been said by the government at this point in time is: Is there going to be any opportunity to use those funds to actually buy into the ORPP? I think there should be.

In fact, there are plans like that out there, Speaker. I know the Service Employees International Union has a plan. A few years ago, the nurses who worked in the long-term-care sector, who were contributing just to RRSPs with matching contributions from their employers, were able to go into that public sector pension plan through the service employees union and they were able to buy back years of service, to a maximum of seven years. There need to be opportunities through this PRPP and ORPP process to let people actually do that, so that they are going to have some defined type of benefit at the end of the day.

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The last piece I want to speak to, though, is the issue of just handing this over to Bay Street. We're saying that everybody deserves a pension and that people who don't have a pension are the ones that we're really doing this for. But at the end of the day, we're doing an RFP out to some third party who is going to earn large administrative fees on these pension dollars.

We had a meeting last week with Great-West Life, for example, about MPPs' contributions to the non-pension plan. In that case, we heard from Great-West Life that our fees are very little on our plan, depending on which fund you're actually in. They can be as little as 0.2%, but in many mutual funds and many RRSPs throughout this province, fees can be 2.75%, 3%, 3.5%. So right off the top, you're handing this over to banks or insurance companies, who are in the business of earning a profit. We know that. We see it with auto insurance. We see that with our banking fees. You have a debit card and you go across the street to another bank, and you have to pay \$2 to draw out \$100.

That is problematic, certainly, for the NDP, that the most vulnerable people, who we want to protect with a pension plan in this province, are perhaps going to be paying the highest fees to banks and insurance companies. We understand that those companies want to make a profit, but it shouldn't be off of a public pension plan.

I think that the government needs to turn their minds to what they're doing there with putting this out of the public realm. We all know that the wages for administering these plans will be very high. Once again, I like to use the word—it will be like winning a lottery, actually being able to administer this kind of plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. David Zimmer: I'm happy to speak to this. I want to make three points. Number one: Associate Minister Hunter, responsible for this file, has been travelling about the province, talking to all manner of stakeholders, from private individuals to banks to insurance companies and the like. The overwhelming message that Minister Hunter receives from all of the stakeholders, across the board, is that this pension plan, this pension enhancement, is required. It is required. This is what the public wants.

The next point that I want to make: The next question to logically ask yourself is, why is there such an appetite in the public and in our public institutions and financial institutions for this? The reason is quite clear: When you dig into the facts, it turns out that pension coverage is low and it's getting lower. In fact, two thirds of Ontarians do not have a workplace pension plan.

The second point is, Ontarians aren't saving enough through voluntary measures. It turns out that there was about \$300 billion in unused RRSP room last year, and 88% unused room in the tax-free savings accounts.

The third point is, it has become quite clear that the current levels of the CPP, administered by the federal government, are not sufficient.

It was the position of all of the provinces, Ontario included, that we would have liked to have proceeded by working with the federal government and enhancing the CPP. But for whatever reasons, the federal government, in a cold-hearted way, just rejected any initiative on that front. So Ontario and the other provinces are stepping to the fore to provide the security that Ontarians need and expect.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: We've debated this ORPP for quite some time now, and it would appear to me as though all we're hearing from the government side is a bunch of finger pointing at the feds. I don't think the feds are doing such a bad job, to be quite honest with you, so I get a little tired of the finger pointing.

We've been saying over here, on the PC side, that the ORPP is really a tax. It's a tax on businesses, an employer tax. I look at that and I'm going, "You know what? Now they're also forcing employees to, in fact, pay an additional 1.9% of their earnings—1.9%."

I have a number of questions. This is what we do know: They're saying they've brought this ORPP in to force employees to save more. Well, one of the things that this government is noted for is the fact that on the outside, it sounds good, but on the inside, it's like, "Give us the details." They don't give us all the details. We don't really know exactly what it's going to be like.

I understand that from ages 17 to 70 is when you can maybe start contributing 1.9% of your wages, and an employer will do that same thing. So what is that going to look like? I know it's based on what their contributions are, but how much money is that really going to make?

The other question is—it's a question of trust. It's a question of trust. We've heard former Premiers say, "I will not raise taxes," and yet what happened? They raised taxes. They say, "This money is going to go towards helping employees." Really and truly, I think that what's going to happen is a lot of this money is going to go toward helping to pay for some of the grandiose infrastructure plans that this government has.

Infrastructure is needed, but I think that that money is not going to be used in an appropriate way, so for that reason, we're not going to be in favour of the ORPP.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, good morning. I'd like to talk about the CPP. I'm not going to agree with my neighbour next door.

I had the privilege of going to Ottawa to lobby, to try to get them to increase and enhance the CPP. It's already in place; it's already there. There's already money there that is going to last another 75 years. What we could do with the federal government is just increase the CPP. The money is there. We don't have to get into this Ontario pension plan if they'd just come to the table. That's one thing that I think is important.

When you talk about what we are going to do with the money—I'm going to give you a couple of examples. We're selling off hydro, which makes absolutely no sense, and our party has been saying it. People in Ontario are saying the same thing.

But when people say, "Well, you know, it's hydro; it will never happen again; we'll never use that money; this is going just to pensions"—does anyone remember, just a few years ago, Dalton McGuinty and the health tax? You remember the health tax that came in and it was going to

go strictly to health care? You hear what happened: They used that money—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Maybe if you'd like to discuss things, you don't have to yell across four rows of chairs. Maybe take it outside. Thanks.

Continue.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The health tax: What they did was they used that money from the health tax—instead of it going to health care, what did they do? They put it in general revenue.

Here's what has happened to our health care in the last little while: As we see, we have cuts to health care. As we see, nurses are being laid off. As we see, in my riding alone, hospitals are being closed. As we see, there is more and more private health care.

So when you talk about the pension plan, we have to make sure there are safeguards in place so that the money can never be used.

Who is going to benefit from this? I heard one of my colleagues from the Liberal Party say people aren't saving enough. I'm going to tell you why they're not saving enough: Because there are no jobs out there that are good-paying jobs. They're going from week to week to survive, because they have to work for minimum wage.

What we should be doing is focusing on making sure that there are good-paying jobs right here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'm quite happy to speak to the ORPP. As members know, it certainly was a key pillar of the government's economic plan to build Ontario up. In fact, everyone will recall that it was a central part of the platform we ran on last year, and we won a majority mandate from Ontarians. It was also part of our 2014 budget, which passed the House this past July.

We know that retirement security is top of mind for Ontarians across the province. I know, when I was knocking on doors in Newmarket–Aurora, many seniors were backing this plan, because they knew that it wasn't necessarily going to benefit them, but it certainly was going to benefit their grandchildren. It is their grandchildren who they are most concerned about.

We've heard this study says that, and another study is pro and some studies are con. But in recent weeks, we've seen reports from BMO, RBC, CIBC and Sun Life Financial that show that Ontarians simply aren't saving enough.

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I know that our associate minister has travelled the province and held dozens of meetings with individuals and associations, business and labour, and she has heard repeatedly how people are concerned that they may never be able to retire or that they'll outlive their savings. These concerns were echoed by many of the people who presented at the public hearings for the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

Mr. Speaker, it's plain to me that we have to make sure that, in future, people are able to retire with dignity. If we can't get the help that's needed for Ontarians facing retirement from the federal government by enhancing the CPP, we will have to do it ourselves. I think everyone's preferred method is to work with the feds, but if they won't come to the table, we have to find a made-in-Ontario solution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Welland has two minutes.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, the member from Niagara Falls, the member from Newmarket-Aurora, and, of course, the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane who used the first 12 minutes.

There were some good points made here. The member from Niagara Falls talked about the fact that there are no jobs, and that's why people can't save. We have so much precarious work in this province. We heard yesterday that the government had committed to creating 67,000 jobs last year, but they didn't hit that target at all. People don't have the money to actually save. But, at the end of the day, it's going to be the most vulnerable people, the people who need these pensions the most, who are going to be impacted. The member from Niagara Falls was right.

There has been an actuarial done federally. I was speaking to Malcolm Allen, the MP from Welland, a couple of weeks ago. He had been at a committee, and he said, "They couldn't even go far enough in the actuarials to beyond 70 years because they have that much money in the plan." That would be the best way, actually, to increase income security across this country.

Now, the member from Newmarket-Aurora talked about the banks. He talked about BMO and CIBC. Those people are all about making profits. Here last year, we heard about the Royal Bank, for example, hiring temporary foreign workers to do IT jobs that were well-paid in the IT sector and actually letting people go who were making \$40,000 and \$50,000 a year, all to earn another per cent for the shareholders for those banks and insurance companies.

We're not saying that we don't support the ORPP in principle, but what we are saying is that there need to be safeguards in place to make sure that every penny of that pension plan is actually going to the people who need it most.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills and the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

It's a pleasure to speak to this bill. We've heard a lot about the principles of the bill. This debate is about the bill, not about the principles that surround it, or the lack of principles that surround it.

I've heard it mentioned by some disputing or refuting that this is a tax. I will say to you, Speaker, it is a tax and it is a nefarious tax in that—and it's been well-document-

ed—you will have to contribute for 40 years before you will receive the full benefits of this Ontario pension plan. Anybody over the age of 25 will be paying this tax, but will not be able to reap the benefits of this pension plan.

We also know that the way this plan is structured right at the moment, if and when you ever do receive any money from this Ontario pension plan, there very likely will be a clawback from the federal pension plan, the CPP. That is a Ponzi scheme at its best, a Ponzi scheme that even Bernie Madoff would not have been able to structure and sell: where you demand and collect money from people, but give them nothing in return and actually end up clawing back from other programs.

It was interesting. The member for Newmarket-Aurora was complaining about the lack of co-operation with the federal government and that the federal government was not interested in coming to the table. Well, Speaker, I can tell you—and I'm sure you would agree with me and most other people would agree with this statement: That is the pot calling the kettle black. When it comes to anybody not working with other members, the Liberal Party of Ontario excels to the extreme. Anybody who has ever been to a committee and has witnessed the clause-by-clause or the amendment process knows full well that the Liberals don't have any idea about working with others. They reject everything out of hand.

Earlier this week, it was announced that a world-class business in my riding lost out on its expansion. Goodyear Canada announced that, due to the unreliability of our electricity system and the exorbitant costs, their expansion will be in Mexico and not in Napanee. This subject was brought up by none other than Liam McGuinty during the committee hearings on this bill. Liam McGuinty, who is with the chamber of commerce—and yes, he is the son of the former Premier—spoke, and he said that we need to consider the broader regulatory impact of not just this bill, but all Liberal government bills. He stated that we have the highest WSIB rates—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's a little loud over there. If you want to have a group session, go outside. Thanks.

Continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker—another demonstration of them working together with others in the House, I guess.

Liam McGuinty stated that with the highest WSIB premiums in the country, the highest electricity rates in the country, the second-highest minimum wage rate in the country and a new carbon tax in hand coming very shortly, along with this ORPP pension plan, this will be devastating and will not just continue, but amplify, the hemorrhaging of jobs and investment in our province. It will have more and more of our jobs leaving this province and new ones not being created here, but being created elsewhere. We saw that with Toyota's announcement of the Corolla production moving to Mexico. We

saw it with the production of GM's Camaro leaving this province.

Clusters are developing, but they're not being developed here in Ontario—clusters of Ontario jobs, Ontario manpower—but in Mexico. And this ORPP will just exacerbate and amplify that hemorrhaging of our jobs and our prosperity in this country.

The Liberal government says that people aren't saving enough. Well, is there any doubt, after 12 years of a Liberal government raiding every purse and every pocket, every wallet and every bank account, wherever it is in the land? Yes, it is tough to save in this province. It's impossible to save for many people. Taking more money out of their pockets is not going to help the situation. Wake up.

A couple of other things, Speaker. The Liberals are proposing a brand new administration, a brand new bureaucracy to administer this ORPP, this pension plan. I don't think I'm just being cynical or that I stand alone on this one: Is there anybody in this province who believes that the Liberals can manage anything? Can they manage helicopters? No. Can they manage eHealth records? No. Can they manage gas plants contracts? No. Can they manage getting a hydro bill out to a person on time? They can't even do that. But now they're going to suggest that they have the management expertise and competencies to administer a successful pension plan? I don't buy it; nobody does.

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Maybe if we could see them get a hydro bill out on time—an accurate hydro bill—and maybe if I could see them actually get an annual report done and tabled in the House on time, those would give us some cause to believe that maybe they've turned a new leaf and are actually taking their responsibilities seriously. But we've not seen any evidence of that.

I can just imagine: They're just going to be totally confused, trying to do a new pension plan and a tax, a cap-and-trade program, at the same time. These guys can't walk and chew gum at the same time, and now they want to have two major undertakings at the same time. Multi-tasking is not their core competency on the other side of this aisle.

Speaker, I said that this is a Ponzi scheme. For 40 years, people are going to be paying into this and not being able to collect. Those people who do collect will then see their federal pensions clawed back. That is a Ponzi scheme. It is a Bernie Madoff specialty.

We're seeing the highest WSIB rates in the land, the highest electricity rates, the second-highest minimum wage, the new carbon tax and the new pension tax. When are they going to stop? When are they going to take a deep breath and relax and let people save some money, let people keep some money in their pockets for a change? Let's get this province back working, instead of creating clusters in Mexico with their policies.

I'm going to vote against this bill, Speaker. I can't imagine anybody who has any compassion for people voting for it. Anybody who has a sense of responsibility

to their constituents; anybody who has compassion for the impoverished and people who are struggling in Ontario—how could they actually vote to take more money? Those few pennies that are left in their pockets and their purses—none of them are safe with this Liberal government. Not one penny, not one nickel, is safe. These guys: Everything is a revenue tool to them. Somebody's savings—they don't care. There's no interest.

If they had any care or compassion about people struggling to make ends meet, they would pull this bill. They'd pull their cap-and-tax bill. They'd start lowering the cost of electricity. They'd start getting accurate bills out to people. They'd start doing their job.

Thank you very much, Speaker. I look forward to voting against Bill 56 at third reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Carleton—Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Like our member from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, I will not be supporting this bill, because it is a bad idea. It will not help the people of Ontario, as it professes to do. It will tax them. They are being taxed to death right now, and we've heard that many times.

We have new taxes being created, such as our cap-and-trade tax for carbon; our hydro bills, paying for green energy, wind turbines and solar panels that produce electricity when the wind blows and the sun shines, which isn't necessarily when we need power—and we turn off our gas plants and our nuclear plants to buy highly subsidized electricity that we don't need—that's a tax.

This pension plan will not provide a benefit for up to 40 years from now, but certainly people will be paying 1.9% of their paycheck to the government for the next 40 years. So will employers, so it's a penalty for employers as well. Basically, this provides cash for a cash-starved government.

We just had a budget where they defined that the deficit will increase above last year's, which increased from the year before. Our debt continues to grow and will hit \$300 billion at the end of this year, and will grow again next year. They're very consistent in their performance, in that they spend and they tax, and they impoverish the people of Ontario. This is one more nail in the coffin for the people of Ontario, who are becoming impoverished by this government.

It does not recognize that different people have different needs for pensions. Some people don't need a pension, because they've done very well in planning their affairs and have money and investments in other forms. Some people need a little bit of pension, or more pension, or a whole lot of pension. It doesn't address the needs of people that vary; there should be flexibility.

Our member from York—Simcoe had the pooled pension idea, which this government is voting on as well, but it will be gutted and nullified by the fact that this one is compulsory and the other one is optional. The other one is the right idea, the pooled pension plan, because it accommodates and provides the flexibility for people to

have the pension that they need, not that the government defines that they must have.

There are an awful lot of things that are not in this bill. I think the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane was talking about transparency, and when you look into this bill, you see nothing, because there's nothing there. It's a bill that says, "We're going to tax you, and that's definite. The benefits will be figured out later"—but they won't be, for a long time.

Here's something very interesting, which I just noticed this morning, which is very consistent with the party opposite's practices for the last 12 years and that have gotten us into the hole that we're in today. I'd like to quote from the explanatory note: "The Minister of Finance is required to prepare a cost-benefit analysis of the plan and must table the report in the Legislative Assembly before December 31, 2015."

We're going to vote on this now. These people want to pass this bill now, and then they want to do a cost-benefit analysis, to see if it will work. You know, Mr. Speaker, that also is consistent with their performance and their business management skills, which consistently follow the precautionary principle. The precautionary principle means, "Let's not let the lack of evidence or science-based data interfere with our ability to make a decision. So we'll make decisions anyway on whatever we feel like today." That's what we're doing here. We're going to pass a bill that is void—there are only a couple of pages here; it doesn't say much—and they'll figure that out later, and they'll even try to figure out if it pays. Well, it pays them, because they need the money to pay the bills. They've been squandering and wasting our money—our taxpayers' money—for years.

It's a travesty, Mr. Speaker. We have to vote against this. It's unfortunate that there aren't more of us here who would do the right thing on this side of the House, and the people of Ontario are going to suffer for that. I will be voting against it.

At this point in time, I'll pass it over to my colleague from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I'm quite pleased to be able to stand up and talk about this bill, and talk about the fallacy behind this and why we can't support it.

I heard the member from Welland talking about how people don't have the money. I'm not sure how you can put a plan in force where you trust the government to take money out of your pocket. If you don't have the money, you're going to have a lot less in your pocket.

You're talking about a government here that has lost a lot of trust. You're talking about taking money out, hoping that, if you're lucky to have a job for 40 years, it's going to be there. And what are we going to do with this money? They're out of money, so they're going to use this money to build roads. It's a novel idea.

0950

What would the return be that you would grant to this fund that you've created? I was sitting on some of the

committees, and we had the OPSEU trust group in, which was averaging a 9% return on their money. Is that what we're talking about here?

When you have somebody taking money out of an account and using it, and they're telling you, "Don't worry; we're going to give you a good return and put it back," and they can borrow money at 1% or 2%, what really is the logic behind what they're doing here?

It's not at arm's length. There certainly seems to be a conflict of interest there. I don't know if I would trust the government, because there have been so many times that I've seen this government really lacking the trust-building.

We look at the plan that is going to put about 54,000 people out of work. There's another group of people—because of the money coming out of the economy; their own study shows that that's the amount—that will not be able to benefit from this plan because they're going to be unemployed, and of course one of the rules is that you have to be employed to actually participate in it. So if you're not working, now you're in the unemployment sector. That's another drain on the system and, I guess, maybe another use for this money, because there's really nothing that says it's going to be used for infrastructure. It's available to the government.

We talk about trust again. Yesterday, I heard them stand up here and complain about the federal government. I know the federal government says that the economy now—I think my colleague from Ottawa was talking about, you know, it's not the right time. Use the science. The evidence is that the economy won't support something right now, but it will in the future. They're talking about enhancing the CPP in the future, when the economy is more apt to handle that. I think that is, again, using the evidence they have.

I was a little annoyed yesterday when they talked about trust again. I see the health care funding and how they've been blaming the federal government for not providing a fair contribution, and actually taking on a former health minister here who, unfortunately, knows what happened back in the days of the Liberal government, that this government is still suffering from. He went back and cut transfer payments of health care that used to be 35%; he reduced them down to 13%. Then they have the gall to complain about the federal government that has raised them back up to 26%, which, in the end, allows them to actually remove money from their portion of health care. So here they are, condemning another side.

If they really want to raise taxes—this federal government is putting tax money back in our pockets. Unfortunately, for every dollar they put back, this government takes one and it squanders two.

There's not a lot of trust, when I look at the scandals and the money wasted. This is another "Give us some more money, because we're broke—and trust me."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member for Manitoulin-Algonia.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Algonia—Manitoulin. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thanks for correcting me.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You're very welcome. It's not often that I get to do that, Mr. Speaker. We've had many, many discussions, and this is where I have an opportunity to butter him up a bit. We've had many opportunities where I've sat with you and we've enjoyed a coffee, and I've indulged into your vast knowledge of how things operate here. You are a true gentleman when you take authority in that chair, and I highly respect that authority. Correcting you is really a privilege on my behalf, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank you for giving me that opportunity.

It's always a pleasure to stand on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin and speak particularly to this bill, Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act. Let's face it: There is some 66%—almost 67%—of individuals across this province who don't have a pension plan, who would love to have a pension plan, who would enjoy having that security, or knowing that that security is going to be there for them once they reach that age, those glory years when you have that opportunity to enjoy something away from work. However, the reality is that there isn't.

On behalf of New Democrats, we would most enjoy seeing an adjustment, an increase, to the CPP. We've got a federal election that is going to be coming up shortly, and we will be seeing a new leader, a new Prime Minister—hopefully in Thomas Mulcair—who will bring those changes going forward, because we obviously know the present Prime Minister has no intentions whatsoever of doing so.

Again, it's always a pleasure to stand. This is something that Ontarians need, so I'll be supporting it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 56. I have to thank the members of the committee who worked hard on this bill, led by my colleague the member from Etobicoke North. I want to thank all members of this Legislature for their comments and for their input into Bill 56, ensuring that we make this bill the best that it can be. I even actually want to thank the members of the PCs—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Don't encourage the member from Nipissing, member from Niagara, okay? You're not in your seat and it's awful loud. Thank you so much.

Continue.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter:—whose amendment we accepted at committee to provide the cost-benefit analysis.

But I have to say I was highly disappointed in the remarks from the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington who talked about this being a Ponzi scheme. I think that that is an absolute disgrace, Speaker, that something like that would be allowed to be said in this Legislature. This is definitely not a Ponzi scheme. We know that a pension for the people of

Ontario—they will make their contributions, matched by their employers, and that income stream will be there for them for life. That is what this is about. This is about ensuring that when people retire, having worked in this province, that they can retire with dignity and that they can have that income stream for life.

I want to remind the members opposite about the next generation: 75% of young workers today do not have pension coverage at work. That is a fact that is actually on the decline. When the ORPP is introduced on January 1, 2017, millions of Ontario workers will now have pension coverage. That is the purpose of Bill 56, and I invite all members of this Legislature—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter:—to support this important legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The quiet member from Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The government's ORPP "is a wide-reaching payroll tax"—I'm reading from Focus on Finance, by the way, Speaker—"that will negatively affect businesses across Ontario and drive jobs out of the province."

I want to read a chapter in Maclean's magazine. Jason Kirby summed up the ORPP, stating that "while the details are still fuzzy, the plan will impose new payroll taxes on those businesses that don't already offer a workplace pension plan the government deems satisfactory. In short: bigger government and higher taxes." He goes on to say, "No wonder the Wynne government has to pay companies to move to Ontario."

Speaker, the CFIB has come out strongly against the ORPP on behalf of their members, stating that 86% of small business owners surveyed did not support the plan. What's more concerning is that 69% of these owners would freeze or cut salaries and 53% would reduce the numbers of employees if the plan were implemented.

A new survey of businesses from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce also indicated that only 26% of their businesses believe that they can shoulder the financial burden associated with the ORPP, and 44% of their businesses said that they would reduce their current payroll or hire fewer employees in the future.

The chamber is calling on the government of Ontario to reconsider its approach. In fact, Allan O'Dette, the president and CEO of the Ontario chamber, stated, "The ORPP is a blanket solution to a problem that requires a targeted approach."

For more reading on the ORPP, you can go to fedeli.com, download Focus on Finance and learn all about it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Toronto-Danforth.

1000

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I've had the opportunity, as the Chair of the social policy committee, for the last five or six weeks to listen to people speak about the Ontario

Retirement Pension Plan, a plan modelled after the CPP, a plan, frankly, that has to be structured very precisely so that some day it can be folded into the Canada Pension Plan so that people can have substantial, secure—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't know how many times I have to stand up. There are seven conversations going on. I honestly can't hear the member from Toronto—Danforth. Do me a favour, if you want to have little group discussions, go outside. There are all kinds of comfortable chairs out there. You can sit and talk to your heart's desire. And the member from Algoma—Manitoulin is a little loud too.

Thanks so much.

Continue.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Why thank you, Speaker.

In any event, it's pretty clear from listening to presenters that the idea of a publicly managed plan, broadly based, with mandatory contributions by employees and employers is the best option that we face in Ontario.

I've had the opportunity to talk to retirees who have come to the Legislature, whose companies had promised them great pensions, and those companies went bankrupt, the pension funds were looted and the employees were out of luck. They were really put into extraordinarily difficult positions. If we want to have pensions that are secure, protected and, frankly, are going to be proof from raiding by corporations that have financial troubles, we need a centrally run, publicly owned pension plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington has two minutes.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to respond to so many of the comments.

But I thought, at first, that the associate minister might have corrected the record of the aboriginal affairs minister when he said, "She's travelled everywhere and everybody's in favour of this bill." Well, that's not quite the way the record shows. CFIB has spoken against this. The chambers of commerce have spoken against it. Many businesses have spoken against it. It's not quite everybody who is in favour of this bill.

I know the associate minister has adamantly said that this is not a Ponzi scheme. I'm sure Bernie Madoff told all his customers, "Everybody likes my plan," as well. "Everybody likes my plan." He likes to tell tall tales, so tall tales and Ponzi schemes go together quite well.

I want to say, I raised in my comments the exodus of jobs. I referenced Goodyear and the announcement of the expansion going to Mexico. I referenced the highest WSIB premiums, the inability to get a hydro bill out in a timely fashion or a correct fashion, the new carbon tax rate. As Liam McGuinty said, we need to consider the broader regulatory impact that these taxes are having on our society.

Nobody from the Liberal side has bothered to address any of those comments, and it's because they can't. That's why they're silent. They'll stand up and stomp

their feet that it isn't a Ponzi scheme, but they won't address the facts and the meat of the matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Further debate? Last call.

Ms. Hunter has moved third reading of Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

This will be a deferred vote after question period.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Orders of the day?

Hon. David Zimmer: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I declare this House recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1005 to 1030.

SPECIAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a special report on winter highway maintenance from the Auditor General.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: I walked into the chamber today and I saw one of my old friends, Jeff Gatcke from Lansdowne, here. I just want to welcome him to Queen's Park. Thank you for being here.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm pleased to introduce to the Legislative Assembly today the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the MNA from Brome—Missisquoi, Pierre Paradis.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise and welcome the family of PC policy manager Mitchell Davidson, who are here visiting today. In the gallery are his parents, Bryan and Andrea Davidson, and his sisters Laura and Ashley Davidson.

I was pleased to have Mitch work in my office, and he's doing a great job in policy.

I'm glad that you could all be here and join us to see him working today. Welcome.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I hope everyone will join me in welcoming Michael Brattman, current president, and Chris Floyd, past president, of the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario. Michael and Chris are from the great riding of Kitchener—Waterloo. Welcome.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to welcome some of my guests from Scarborough—Agincourt, from the Agincourt Community Services awareness project, funded by the Trillium Foundation. They'll be coming in very shortly with their group leader, Anna Kim.

I also want to welcome a former colleague, Peter Shurman, from—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ahem.

Ms. Soo Wong: Oh. Anyway, I just want to welcome him.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thanks for almost stealing my thunder.

I'm honoured to welcome my predecessor, Peter Shurman, the former MPP from Thornhill. He'll be here all day if you want to chat with him, because I believe he's staying for the 5:30 reception for Jewish Heritage Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're both stealing my thunder.

Introductions? Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'd also like to welcome the Insurance Brokers Association and all their delegates, who are representing all parts of our province here today at Queen's Park as part of their annual awareness day. I'd like to also acknowledge the president, Michael Brattman, for being here.

Please don't forget to attend their reception in the legislative dining room this evening at 5 o'clock. Apparently, Mr. Speaker, all of us are invited, and it's sure to be a great, great evening.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I would like to welcome Rick Orr, who is from Stratford. He's with the Insurance Brokers Association here today, from my great riding of Perth-Wellington.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to welcome Greg Robertson, my local broker, here with the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario. Also, I think Debbie Thompson, the past president, is here somewhere.

And here for Jewish Heritage Month celebrations is Arthur Lofsky. Shalom, Arthur.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me welcome three individuals from DeafBlind Ontario Services: Roxanna Spruyt-Rocks, the CEO; Karen Keyes, director of client services; and Barb Hooton, the board chair.

I invite all members of the House to the reception hosted by DeafBlind Ontario today, from 1 to 4 p.m. in room 228.

Mr. Joe Dickson: In the gallery this morning, we have guests from Ajax—just east of here, Mr. Speaker. We have the great Van Kempen family, representing Best Buy and the largest realty company in the area.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're welcome.

The member from Halton.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to welcome Helen Watson, who is here from Halton. Helen's daughter, Carina Watson, is page captain today. Welcome to Queen's Park, Helen.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'd like to welcome Debbie Thompson, Greg Robertson, Alanna Taylor, and Jeff Gatcke from the wonderful riding of Kingston and the Islands. They're all here from the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To diminish my thunder twice, as it is the tradition of the Speaker to introduce former members: the member for Thornhill in the 39th and 40th Parliament, Mr. Peter Shurman, who is watching over there.

Point of order, the member from Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Speaker, earlier I introduced some guests in the gallery and I mentioned that one of them, Mitch, worked in my office. I forgot to mention that he didn't actually work in my office; he was an Ontario legislative intern in my office—and he was one of the best we've had. I just wanted to make sure that I put that on the record.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All members have the right to correct their record on a point of order, and I appreciate the member from Oxford doing so.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. You claim to be open and transparent, but again, you say one thing and do the complete opposite. Under your budget, the moment you sell Hydro One, it is no longer deemed an agency of the crown; so no more oversight from the Auditor General, the Financial Accountability Officer, the Ombudsman, the Integrity Commissioner—all gone. No more disclosure. No more freedom of information.

This is the last time now we'll find out that you spent \$7 million on consultants, including \$24,000 for a speechwriter. No more sunshine list. This is the last time we'll see Sandra Papatello's six-figure salary or know that Carmine Marcello made \$728,000. All this will be done behind closed doors now, just the way you like it.

Premier, tell the people of Ontario: What are you trying to hide this time?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. I will be as vigilant as always. When I stand, before I get a chance to sit down, if I hear it I'm going to nail it.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just step back and again make it clear that we are unlocking the value of our assets to invest in major infrastructure projects. I recognize that the party opposite is fundamentally opposed to that because they don't have a plan and they never had a plan. They don't want to invest in infrastructure.

We're going to take Hydro One public. It will modernize the company. It will make it more efficient.

The member opposite knows that officers of the Legislature do not have jurisdiction over publicly traded companies. He knows that. But he also knows that a publicly traded company has different mechanisms of oversight. We're committed to making sure that Hydro One will remain regulated.

As we went through this process with Ed Clark and his group, we made it clear that those protections needed to stay in place. The regulation and the price control, those will stay in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, in the foreword of last year's budget, you wrote, "In total, the government will invest over \$130 billion in infrastructure." The \$130 billion you now tout as the crown jewel of the budget was actually announced last year, except last year's budget did not need the sale of the GM shares, the \$9 billion from Hydro One, the LCBO building, OPG's offices and all these others to make it work. It only said you needed \$3 billion. Now you're up to about a dozen billion dollars.

What happened? Why does it now take a massive fire sale of public assets just to make your budget numbers work? You say that you're putting billions of dollars of new money into infrastructure, but you're quietly shifting existing money—money that was already in the budget—just to reduce your deficit.

Interjections.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There's a lot of back and forth going on while the question is being put. I'd ask both sides—and forget pointing. It's an annoyance. All sides have to have my discipline sometimes.

Please finish your question. Wrap up quickly.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, isn't that money actually going to pay for your government's financial mismanagement?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, I think that the member opposite is mistaking what his party did with the 407 for what we're actually doing, because, in the 407 sell-off, there was no future protection for the people of Ontario; there was no protection of that stream of revenue that has gone to a private company; there was no protection in terms of the regulation of that asset; and there was no investment in a future asset for the benefit of the economy going forward. We actually used the 407 as a model of how not to do this, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Essex, the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek and the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, take it outside.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have a long memory.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: If I can just say, Mr. Speaker, to the issue of what we said when: In the text of the May 2014 budget, on assets, on page 20, if the member would like to look it up, we said this: "The government will look at maximizing and unlocking value from assets it currently holds, including real estate holdings as well as crown corporations" such as OPG, Hydro One—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Time is up.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke will come to order—second time. I'm still talking. The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke—the second time.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, I will remind you also: On that same page, it talks about it being limited to \$3.1 billion. You're now at more than \$12 billion.

The government continues to show no progress on our debt and deficit, but Moody's Investor Services told us they continue to "see risks" in the province's budget, that your "deficits have shown little progress in the past few years, and in fact have increased from 8.1% of revenues ... to 9.2%." Worst of all, they say that "provincial economic forecasts have tended to overestimate growth."

You fluffed last year's budget numbers, and after only four months you had to come back here and confess that you were off by \$500 million. We can only imagine how much you fluffed this year's budget numbers. Is that why you're selling assets, increasing taxes and raising our hydro bills? Premier, why are you asking seniors and families to pay for 12 years of mismanagement?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite asked the questions: Why are we selling assets? Why are we doing this? Why are we looking at our assets? Why did we, in the May 2014 budget—and I'm going to quote this because it's important in answering his question, Mr. Speaker. What we said, in the May 2014 budget, on page 20: "The government will look at maximizing and unlocking value from assets it currently holds, including real estate holdings as well as crown corporations such as Ontario Power Generation, Hydro One and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario."

But, Mr. Speaker, the fundamental question that was embedded in his question was, "Why are we doing this?" We're doing it because we need to invest in the infrastructure that is needed in the 21st century. That's the roads, the bridges, the transit projects—all of that will not be done if we don't make these choices, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If I stuck around here long enough, the Liberals would give me a standing ovation.

My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Her mandate letter says, "You will drive efficiencies and reduce costs to achieve our commitment to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18." Yet the deficit increased by \$400 million in this last year. The only efficiencies Ontarians have seen is the rapid speed of light in bringing in new taxes like the job-killing payroll tax, the carbon tax and the fuel tax.

Since she hasn't met her mandate letter, can the Treasury Board president now admit that the only way the Liberals will be able to balance the budget by 2018 is to increase taxes and create new ones?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the question, because it is an absolute responsibility of mine to make sure that when we spend money, we get great value for every dollar that we spend. With my colleagues on Treasury Board, we are going through a program review, renewal and transformation, where we are going line by line, program by program, ministry by ministry, to make sure we're getting the best possible value, the best possible outcomes for people, through that process.

I am enormously optimistic. If you look at our health spending, we went from growing by 6% to 7% a year to about a 2% increase per year, and we've done that while continuing to improve services for people.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The minister knows full well that she and her trusty assistant, the finance minister, are not capable of balancing the budget. For the third straight year, we have seen the deficit increase. It's going in the wrong direction, Treasury Board President.

We have not seen the size, the scope or the cost of government go down. In fact, the sunshine list grew by 14%, with over 100,000 people in Ontario on the public payroll making over \$100,000. The government even had to pay Ed Clark \$7 million to do the Treasury Board president's job.

All they have to offer, when Ontarians are suffering and having a difficult time paying their hydro bill, is a beer ombudsman. How does she expect Ontario families to take this government seriously when they're more committed to having a beer ombudsman than they are to reducing the bills of everyday Ontarians?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.
Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite is trying to create a narrative, but she's not basing it on the facts. If she would read the budget, if she would look at the budget and look at our spending, she would discover that our spending this past year was actually \$1.6 billion less than we had anticipated, than we had budgeted for.

We are making those hard decisions. We are doing it in a thoughtful way, in a way that protects the services that people rely on. We are determined to continue to work to transform the way government services are delivered, so that we can achieve the objective and get better services and better government in the end.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Here are the facts, and here is what we call your thoughtfulness, Minister: Teachers are striking; nurses are being fired; hydro bills are going up; taxes have been introduced; the government is selling off Hydro; the deficit's going up; and your finance minister spends the day after the budget at a brewery. Come on.

Those aren't the priorities of the people of Ontario. They aren't the priorities of this—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'll make the comment that although the noise started to come from here, there were other comments coming while she was putting the question. It makes it difficult for me to stop one side or the other, so I'm stopping both.

Please finish.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The minister has failed to live up to her mandate letter. She had to bring in Ed Clark to do a fire sale of assets, and they celebrate over a pint while Ontario families are choosing whether they can heat their home or keep groceries in their refrigerator.

I want to ask the Treasury Board president this: How does she expect us to believe she's doing her job when they cannot—at all—meet the deficit reduction targets they have promised this House, they have promised the people of Ontario? Yet they failed—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The President of the Treasury Board is doing a fantastic job, surpassing all expectations. As a result of her work, we've recalibrated our spending by \$1.6 billion, and we're moving ahead to balance the books.

But don't take it from us. Take it from someone that they admire. They often refer to Don Drummond; they love the man. Here's what he said: First, the budget must present fiscal details for that year. Second, it must take "reasonable economic assumptions."

Interjection.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Nepean—Carleton, come to order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Third, it must provide "a generous contingency buffer." Fourth, it should be credible about its revenue projections. Fifth, "spending increases must be modest" and controlled.

He says this, "On the basis of these five tests the 2015 budget's plan to restore fiscal balance by 2017-18 is credible." He believes in us, and so should they, because we want to make sure we protect the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. The Liberals insist it's okay to spend \$7 million on high-priced consultants to make sure that they get the Hydro One sell-off "right."

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader, second time.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Let's be clear: Selling off Hydro One is simply wrong. Ontarians are going to pay the price.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: When the Premier was paying a \$24,500 tab for Paul Martin's speechwriters, what advice did they receive for Ontario families in terms of their hydro bills and how they were going to afford those?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's very important to us, as we make the investments in transit, as we do what's necessary to be able to do that—to invest in transportation infrastructure, to build infrastructure around the province—that as we make those decisions and we review the assets, we do that in a way that's responsible. That's why we brought in people like Ed Clark, like actuaries, like people who have the experience in the private sector, who understand the market. We were very, very clear that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Welland.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —we needed that expertise in order to be able to do the review of the assets that was necessary. We need to get this right.

Again, I point to the 407 and the decisions that were made by the Conservatives. We were determined not to go down that path, but to do this in a way that was responsible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's not just Paul Martin's speechwriters. The Premier is sending Ontario families a tab for \$974,000—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: —so she can pay Dalton McGuinty's consulting firm. The Premier is literally spending a million dollars so Liberals can help Liberals.

The people want to know what this means for them. The people want to know what they paid \$7 million of public money for. What did these consultants have to say about hydro bills and how the Premier would make up for—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: —the millions of dollars of lost revenue due to the sale?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite asks good questions in terms of how we would make up the revenue. How would we make sure that the asset would be valued properly in the market? What would be the best way for the government to retain de facto control over major decisions? How would we make sure that the regulatory and price controls would stay in place?

That's exactly why we needed to have expert advice. It's exactly why the advisory panel has been open and transparent about the use of third parties. There were people who have ability in actuarial services, analytics. There were people who were able to support us in the negotiation in terms of the council on beverage alcohol. There was project management expertise, expert advice on energy regulation.

We believe that having expert advice is the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The plan to sell hydro off is simply the wrong decision. The Premier has spent \$7 million in public money on these consultants. Now the people deserve to know what they paid for. They need to know what these consultants have had to say about reliability. What have they said about rates? What did they say about the billions of dollars in lost revenue?

If the Premier claims to have an open and transparent government, then will the Premier table the reports from these consultants today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows that the decisions about what would be released and what would not be released is made by non-partisan public servants, and those decisions have been made.

But I really think it is quite remarkable that the third party believes that to review assets that are worth billions of dollars—we would do that without expert advice. Now maybe that's the way they would do it. When you look at their platform, which was very, very thin, there clearly had been no due diligence done on how they would implement anything in their platform.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No. She's not done.

Thank you.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: So our position is that having the expert advice was necessary, and had we not sought expert advice, imagine what they would be saying right now.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. The Premier is telling one story. She says she's selling 60% of Hydro One and the Liberals will keep 40%, but the legislation tells a very different story. The legislation specifically gets ready for the day when Ontario owns less than 10% of Hydro One.

Can the Premier explain why she's preparing for Ontario to own less than 10% of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the member opposite neglects to say is that we are building into this process and into this legislation decision-making authority that would protect the people of Ontario. So any decision of that kind of magnitude would require a two-thirds majority of the Hydro One board of directors, which means that having 40% ownership protects us.

Let me read the restriction on the province's sale. This is from Bill 91, the Building Ontario Up Act, section 48.2: "The minister, on behalf of Her Majesty in right of Ontario shall not sell, dispose of or otherwise divest any common shares of Hydro One Inc. if the sale, disposal or divestment would result in the minister on behalf of Her Majesty in right of Ontario owning a number of common shares that is less than 40% of the outstanding number of common shares of Hydro One Inc."—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I move to the supplementary question, the dialogue back and forth is continuing while someone on that side is putting a question—the talk—and somebody on this side giving the answer—the talk.

Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: So the Premier has just set out her case. This Premier has no mandate to sell Hydro One, but that's not stopping her. She says she'll keep 40% of the privatized company, but the legislation sends a clear message: The Premier is getting ready for the day when Ontarians own less than 10% of Hydro One.

Why is the Premier leaving the back door open so Ontarians could end up owning less than 10% of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let's just be clear that what underlies the question that the member has asked is an assumption that building transit and transportation infrastructure really isn't that important, because he's not willing and his party is not willing to acknowledge that they ran on reviewing the assets of the province. It was part of their platform. It was part of their—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It was part of their assumptions. The fact is we are implementing what we ran on and what they ran on.

The Ontario government will nominate 40% of the Hydro One board and will have the power to unilaterally dismiss the board. That means that the government will have de facto veto on the board for a decision like the dissolution of the shares. That's the reality. We're doing this so we can build transit and transportation infrastructure around the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The Premier still doesn't answer the question as to why the potential is set up in this bill for the province to own less than 10% of the shares. Liberals say they'll keep 40% of a privatized Hydro One, but it's clear the Premier has left the door open to owning less than 10%.

The Premier kept Ontarians in the dark about her plan to sell Hydro One during the last election. She doesn't have a mandate to sell off Hydro One, whether it leaves us with 40% or 4%. It's the wrong plan and Ontarians are going to pay the price.

Is the Premier trying to keep Ontarians in the dark about what her plan really means for Hydro One and for Ontario?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite once again is talking about the dilution of shares. I would just read again what I said. The fact is that the Ontario government will nominate 40% of the Hydro One board and will have the power to unilaterally dismiss the board. Any decision like that, in terms of the dilution of the shares, would require a vote of two thirds of the board. It would require that supermajority vote. So the fact is that that kind of decision would not be made, because we would have 40% of the vote.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of not investing in infrastructure, the cost of not investing in assets that are needed for the 21st century—that is the cost that we have to focus on. We ran on a plan to find a way to make those investments that are going to allow this province to thrive. They don't want to do that in the third party. The party opposite doesn't want to do that. We said we were going to do it, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is for the Premier. Premier, today's Auditor General's report on winter road maintenance reads like a damning indictment of a government that has placed cost savings over the safety of Ontario motorists.

Premier, when you were Minister of Transportation, you watched and did nothing while performance-based contracts your Liberal government introduced to save a few bucks caused winter road conditions to deteriorate across the province, placing the lives of Ontarians at risk.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm being challenged, so the Minister of Agriculture is warned, and the member from Nepean—Carleton will come to order—second time.

Carry on.

Mr. Michael Harris: Premier, where are your priorities? You waste a billion dollars on gas plants to save a few Liberal seats, and then you try to save a few bucks on the backs of Ontario motorists.

Premier, is saving Liberal seats more important to your government than saving lives on our Ontario highways?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin my answer today by publicly thanking the Auditor General and her team for the very thorough review that they have conducted with respect to the Ministry of Transportation's winter maintenance program.

Speaker, I've said many times publicly and in this House that there is no more crucial responsibility that's part of my mandate than to make sure that Ontario's highways remain, as they have been for the last 13 years, ranked amongst the first or second most safe in all of North America.

But just because we've taken significant steps—which I can highlight in the supplementary answer—since the internal review we conducted in 2013 does not mean that the work has ended. We will continue to work with our area maintenance contractors. We will continue to deploy additional resources, and I will personally work as hard as I can to make sure that going forward we continue to improve this already improving program.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Speaker, back to the Premier: An apology perhaps would have been more appropriate.

I want to thank my colleague from Leeds–Grenville for actually asking the auditor to do this important report.

Premier, for five years, this government knowingly risked the lives of Ontario motorists to save a few dollars. For five years, you've pointed the finger at contractors for unclear roads that were the direct result of your government's flawed cost-cutting contracts. You knew it, and did nothing about it.

Premier, I'll give you a chance to be honest with Ontarians today. Why did the ministry, a ministry you oversaw, continue awarding obviously flawed contracts when you knew it was jeopardizing the safety of Ontario motorists?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Since I brought it to your attention several times, the member from Nepean–Carleton—while the question is being asked—is now warned. The deputy House leader is now warned.

Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, I thank the member for his question. I will also say that I do thank the members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for asking the auditor to conduct this review.

It is important to remember, Speaker, that in 2013, before the request that the committee put forward to the auditor, the Ministry of Transportation conducted a comprehensive internal review with respect to our winter maintenance program.

As a result of that review, since that point in time, we have deployed 105 additional pieces of equipment through two winters, winters 2013–14 and 2014–15: 55 pieces of equipment, mostly for northern Ontario, for truck climbing and passing lanes, and 50 pieces of equipment in southern Ontario for ramps and shoulders. We've retained a director of maintenance. We've added 20 new area

inspectors—that's one per area—to help us assist in the oversight of this program.

Again, as I said in the original answer, that does not mean our work is done. When you have the track record, as we do, for having the safest highways in North America consistently, first- or second-safest for 13 years—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —it means the job is going well, but we—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Why has the Premier created a loophole in her budget bill so that she can spend the money from the Hydro One sale on anything she wants instead of legally requiring the money to flow into the Trillium Trust for transit and transportation infrastructure?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Finance is going to want to speak to the details of this, but let me just be clear: The reason that we put in our budget and our platform a review of assets, the reason that we are going forward with the partial sale of Hydro One, the reason we sold GM shares and the reason we sold real estate is so that we can invest in infrastructure that is needed in this province.

That money is going into the Trillium Trust and that money is then going to be used to make those investments. That is what we ran on, that is what we are doing and that is what you will see on our balance sheet.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The Premier can make the same argument again and again, but what it boils down to is this: The Premier has opened a loophole in her own legislation so she can spend her Hydro One money on anything she wants. The idea that any money is earmarked for transit or infrastructure is Liberal spin. There's nothing to back it up in this bill.

After eHealth, after the gas plants, after the Sudbury bribery scandal and after four OPP investigations, it's a bit rich for them to say, "Just trust us." Nobody in the province trusts you.

Will the Premier admit that her promises about the Trillium Trust are just Liberal spin, pure and simple?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: In the 2013 economic statement, we introduced the Trillium Trust to dedicate it for the benefit of reinvesting, dollar for dollar, every net proceed that we get from the sale of shares, the sale of land and the broadening of ownership of our various crown corporations. We've made that commitment. We stated it in the 2013 economic statement. We stated it in the 2014 budget, which we introduced twice before this House. We stated it in the 2014 economic statement. We stated it again in this very document for 2015, recognizing that this is a dedicated fund for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

That does not change. That is exactly what we're doing—the point being, the opposition, members on both sides, have no plan, no idea and have yet to put forward any alternative by which to fund these opportunities that will be to the benefit of Ontario for future generations to come.

SERVICES FOR THE DISABLED

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: My question is for the Attorney General and the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure.

In Ontario, we have close to 200,000 residents living with either total or partial vision loss. That's close to 200,000 residents who face challenges being fully active and independent members of society, people who often struggle just to get around in their daily lives.

Fortunately, we have a number of organizations in Ontario dedicated to providing assistance to visually impaired Ontarians. The Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides, for example, is based out of Oakville and provides trained canine companions to help guide them safely around their communities.

As I'm sure many of you know, today is International Guide Dog Day. When individuals in this province need specialized care, this government has been able to provide it.

Could the Attorney General enlighten the House on the Blind Persons' Rights Act and how it ensures that the people of Ontario have the proper services provided for them?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais remercier la députée de Halton pour cette question, qui est très appropriée aujourd'hui.

Yes, today is International Guide Dog Day, and I will gladly tell this House how this government is ensuring services for Ontarians who need them.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act is an important piece of legislation that applies to guide dogs used by blind persons. The act makes it an offence to deny a blind person accompanied by a guide dog access to accommodation, services or facilities.

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The act states that a person with a guide dog should not be discriminated against with respect to accommodation, services or facilities, or the charges for their use. The Blind Persons' Rights Act is a very important piece of legislation that ensures blind persons are properly accommodated in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I would like to thank the Attorney General for that update. It is encouraging that our government took steps in 2007 to amend this legislation, giving the visually impaired a stronger tool.

Unfortunately, there are still barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully integrating into society and into the workplace. In Halton, organizations like the Canadian National Institute for the Blind have made great efforts to break these barriers down. The CNIB pro-

vides community-based supports, teaches critical life skills and offers counselling and training services to keep our visually impaired residents active and independent. But more can still be done.

I know that the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure has been working with his partners to create a more accessible Ontario through the implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Would the minister please update the House on this implementation?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Just by way of explanation to bring clarity, we always go to the minister with a question. You don't direct it. They have to direct it. Just to make sure everyone knows that.

Attorney General.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Au ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I welcome the opportunity to talk about accessibility in this Legislature, especially on International Guide Dog Day.

We've made great strides in this province, Mr. Speaker. Ontario is a global leader when it comes to accessibility. We're first in the world when it comes to being a modern regulatory regime that mandates accessibility. We're the first jurisdiction in the world that requires staff to be trained on accessibility. We're first in Canada with legislation that sets out clear goals and time frames.

We're approaching the 10th anniversary of the AODA. It's an important time to recognize we've come a long way, but we also must recalibrate to achieve our goal of full accessibility by 2025. This is a great time to do that.

We must open up employment opportunities for people with disabilities. We must work with our business community to improve compliance. I'm looking forward to working with—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Attorney General. Minister, as you know, earlier this year justice of the peace Errol Massiah was found guilty by the Justices of the Peace Review Council for judicial misconduct due to sexual harassment, for the second time. In 2012, he was found guilty of judicial misconduct for sexually harassing female staff in a Durham courthouse.

Yesterday, the Justices of the Peace Review Council recommended that Massiah be removed from his position as a justice of the peace. Do you intend to accept that recommendation, Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, the recommendation was made by the Justices of the Peace Review Council, which is independent from government and is mandated to receive and investigate complaints about the conduct of justices of the peace.

I will not be commenting on the decision but, as required by law, I will convey the hearing panel's recommendation to cabinet, and cabinet will consider the hearing panel's recommendation at the first reasonable opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Minister, I can't believe you need even two minutes to think about this. For five years, Massiah has been collecting a salary of over \$120,000, and for five years, the only thing that he has been doing is figuring out ways to avoid this review panel.

In 2012, when Massiah was found guilty of judicial misconduct for his treatment of female staff, you paid his legal fees to the tune of \$123,000. Yesterday, he had the audacity to ask you to pay his fees again.

Massiah has been on administrative leave since 2010.

Minister, you have an opportunity to show some leadership, both as the Attorney General and as a cabinet minister who will defend against workplace harassment. Stand with the victims, fire Errol Massiah today, and turn down his ridiculous request to pay his legal fees.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: As I said, Mr. Speaker, the Justices of the Peace Review Council is an independent body that investigates complaints about the conduct of justices of the peace and determines appropriate sanctions where necessary. On this side of the House, we respect this process, and we have not yet received any recommendations from the Justices of the Peace Review Council on the payment of legal fees.

I will be waiting for these recommendations. If recommendations are made, I can assure you that we will review the council's recommendations carefully. As I've said, we have not yet received recommendations from the committee.

TEACHERS' LABOUR DISPUTES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Premier, elementary school teachers have called your latest central offer offensive, not least of all because your government appears to be flip-flopping on class sizes. Teachers with the Catholic board have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a strike. Secondary school teachers in Peel region are just a few days away from joining Durham and Rainbow district educators who are already engaged in job action.

While your government continues to dismiss their concerns and cause chaos in our schools, families and students are—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development is warned.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: —undoubtedly paying the price.

How many more students need to miss class before the government finally takes responsibility for the havoc it is causing in our schools?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want kids in school, I want teachers and support staff in school, and I know that's where they want to be. I also know that in order for us to reach an agreement, we have to go through the collective bargaining process. I would have thought that that party, above all others, would have understood that a strong collective bargaining process was what was necessary.

We have a new process in place. There's a local component, and there's a central component. The central component of the bargaining process is ongoing, and those decisions and those agreements have to be reached at the table. That's where we're going to have the discussions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm just wondering if the Premier remembers Bill 115.

While the Premier continues to skirt responsibility for the mess her government's cuts are creating in our education system, New Democrats have been standing with teachers in Pickering, Oshawa, Sudbury and Manitoulin. Families and education workers across Ontario are outraged by Liberal cuts to education, forced school closures and broken promises to keep class sizes manageable.

Ontarians know that the provincial government holds ultimate responsibility over our education system. When will this government finally stop dismissing the concerns of Ontarians and answer for their clear plan of education austerity?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: People come from all over the world to see our publicly funded education system. Our kids compete with students from all over the country, all over North America. We're at the top in terms of literacy rates, in terms of the ability of our students. We have one of the best-educated workforces in the world.

I know that having a strong collective bargaining process is necessary. That's why, when I became the leader, we worked with the union leadership, with the federations to set up a new process. They had input into that process, because we had actually learned from a process that had not worked as well as it should have.

That process is taking its course. It's tough. It is tough bargaining; there is no doubt about that, because we have said and we know that there is no new money to put into compensation. That makes the bargaining tough, but it's a collective bargaining process at—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Yvan Baker: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, as you may know, I don't come from a community with a large agri-food sector, but I know that my constituents understand the importance of the agri-food sector to our econ-

omy, and they benefit from it every single day as they purchase the wonderful foods that our agri-food sector produces.

Minister, the Premier's Agri-Food Growth Challenge is an opportunity to show our province—and the world, I would say—the important contribution our agri-food sector makes to our economy and our quality of life.

As we know, expanding trade can be a key part of developing and strengthening Ontario industries at home and abroad. Building relationships with foreign governments and businesses helps Ontario showcase and increase our exports. China is one of those key partners, Minister. The Chinese market is growing rapidly and is currently Ontario's second-largest agri-food export market. In 2014, agri-food sales to China reached \$832 million.

Minister, could you please inform the House on the trade mission to China you participated in, and how opportunities for our agri-food sector in the Chinese—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

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Hon. Jeff Leal: Speaker, néih hóu. It's good to be back. I'm working on my Cantonese.

Thank you to the member for Etobicoke Centre for the question. Ontario agricultural commodities and products are known worldwide for their quality and safety. It is why, more and more, countries like China are looking to Ontario.

While in China, Minister Chan and I aimed to build on the success of Ontario's agri-food exporters while introducing a new group of companies to this important market. Our delegation was made up of a diverse range of over 20 businesses and organizations, representing a broad cross-section of Ontario's agri-food sector.

Throughout our time in China, Minister Chan and I were able to help businesses and organizations identify and act on new export opportunities, with the goal of seeing immediate results, and build relationships with Chinese government and business leaders, setting the stage for continued growth over the long term.

Mr. Speaker, promoting increased trade and investment in Ontario's agri-food sector will help meet—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Minister. It's clear that your trade mission to China represents an important step forward for our agricultural and agri-food sector.

I know, during your time there—or I understand, at least—that you and Minister Chan and the delegates were able to promote trade opportunities in Ontario to over 300 Chinese agri-food companies and government officials who participated in seminars, round tables, and other meetings of the like.

I understand that these actions, obviously, not only build relationships, but also support new businesses and organizations in identifying and acting on export opportunities. This is really where the rubber hits the road for the agri-food sector here in Ontario.

Minister, could you please inform the House of some of the agreements secured in China and how they will benefit Ontario's agri-food sector?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank my good friend from Etobicoke Centre for the supplementary.

Our mission has resulted in increased exports for Ontario products in China, and new investment opportunities for Ontario agri-food companies. I'd just like to give you the list of our signed deals in China.

A new deal will see \$2 million worth of Ontario maple syrup heading to China, doubling our annual maple syrup exports.

Both Pillitteri and Vineland Estates have reached new agreements that will bring more Ontario icewine to China. The investment will establish a new vineyard and a new winery in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Ontario's Vineland Estates winery announced a new wine retailing and distribution agreement. The agreement will see more than \$1 million of the winery's products sold in China in the coming year.

This mission represented an important step forward for Ontario's agri-food sector. It allowed new businesses and organizations to build on the momentum—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. We all know Gerry Loughheed called Andrew Olivier on December 11. We all know Pat Sorbara called Mr. Olivier on December 12. But what we didn't know was that Pat Sorbara called the deputy director of HR in the Premier's office of public appointments and human resources on December 10. That was just one day before Gerry Loughheed offered Mr. Olivier appointments, jobs, or whatever.

Premier, was Pat Sorbara organizing a job or appointment for Andrew Olivier in exchange for stepping down?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It feels like a little bit of déjà vu at the moment. I think it was very clear, as we've discussed this matter in the House, that there's an independent process that is going on outside this Legislature, and we should respect that process. I don't know what changes now that the official opposition is asking the same questions again.

The Premier has been very forthcoming. The Premier has said that she's going to co-operate with the investigation that is taking place, and at an appropriate time she will do it.

We in this House should not be engaging in those types of discussions, and we should let our independent investigative authorities do their work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: My question, back to the Premier: You've stalled the OPP investigation for over three months. You've allowed Pat Sorbara full access to all the Sudbury bribery scandal documents since the story

broke. This new information was only provided because of a freedom-of-information request.

Premier, you've been hiding the truth since the story broke. Why was Pat Sorbara calling your office responsible for public appointments the day before Andrew Olivier was offered a bribe?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Leeds–Grenville.

I'm going to ask him to withdraw. There are moments in which I've made it clear, when this has been going on, that there are things I do not accept. This is one of them. Would you please withdraw?

Mr. Steve Clark: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. Again, I think the member opposite is just trying to throw up a tale here. I think the facts are very clear, that there's a process that is taking place and we should respect that process.

I want again to remind all the members in this House that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The members from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and Prince Edward–Hastings.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: —we have a principle of presumption of innocence. In this instance, no criminal charges have been laid; for that matter, no charges have been laid.

I want to remind the members opposite, again, what the Chief Electoral Officer said in his report: “I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges.” Speaker, I remind members opposite again that none of us are either prosecutors or judges. We should respect their role, we should respect their responsibilities and let them do their work.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you have said to this House and you have said to the public that you will be meeting with the Ontario Provincial Police this April in order to go through the interview process that they need to go through in regard to the Mr. Olivier scandal. Can you confirm to this House if you've already met with the OPP? Will you be meeting today or will you be meeting tomorrow, which is the last day of the month?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, as I've said, I'll be meeting with the OPP before the end of the month and, as I've said, I'll co-operate completely with the authorities outside of this House, where the investigation is taking place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, what is really hard here for the public to accept is a Premier who says that she is progressive and that she wants to govern from the progressive centre, and here she is trying to stymie an OPP investigation. There is not a citizen in this province that would have the ability to say to the police, “Sorry, I'm busy, can't meet with you today. Sorry, I'm busy, can't meet with you next month. Sorry, I'm busy, maybe some time in April.” That doesn't cut it for anybody in this province. Why should it cut it for you?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Will you confirm that, in fact, you will be meeting with the OPP today or tomorrow?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, this Premier has been co-operating with all agencies, as the Premier has been very clear. She will be meeting with the OPP. The time has been determined.

But to say that this Premier has not been busy is a bit naive on the part of the opposite member. This is a Premier who is one of the most activist and progressive Premiers that we've ever seen in this province. This is a Premier who has been working hard to make sure that we are building Ontario up. This is a Premier who has put forward a budget that ensures that we are building our talents and skills, that we are building infrastructure in this province, that we are making sure that we have got public infrastructure and transit infrastructure across the province.

Those parties have no plan, Speaker. They're doing nothing but being obstructionist. We support this Premier. We support her plan and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

New question.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the minister responsible for seniors affairs. Speaker, the minister often reminds this Legislature that Ontarians are aging rapidly. In the next 25 years, the senior population is expected to grow to a staggering 4.5 million. Data from Statistics Canada indicates that life expectancy for women in Canada is 84 years, compared to 80 for men. It is clear that as seniors age the proportion of women increases dramatically. It is also important to note that since most workers retire at 65, Ontarians now enjoy almost 15 to 25 years of retirement living.

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My riding of Kingston and the Islands is one of Ontario's—indeed Canada's—primary retirement destinations. Seniors are impressed by our high-quality health

care, housing, transportation, culture and community services.

Can the minister please share with us what measures are being taken to deliver important services that address these key demographic shifts in our community and province?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Thank you to the member from Kingston and the Islands for the question.

Speaker, believe me, we are very much aware that women in our province are living longer than men, and we continue to be very mindful of this very rapid shift in demographics. In fact, in 2014, there were 42% more females than men over the age of 75 living in the province of Ontario. As well, currently, women represent some 72% of all Canadians living with Alzheimer's disease.

In 2013, we launched Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors, developing and delivering programs and initiatives that support senior-friendly communities, create better access to health care and increase quality resources for women and seniors. The well-being of our seniors is taken very seriously by—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you to the minister for his response.

Recently, I attended the Walk for Memories, an event held by the Alzheimer Society chapter in my riding. Through funding allocated by the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, the Alzheimer Society of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington is able to host meetings to promote the Finding Your Way wandering prevention program. These meetings allow seniors, families, police services, cultural groups, and health and community agencies to plan strategies for increasing awareness and education on dementia in the Kingston and the Islands area.

Approximately 3,000 seniors—almost 10% of the seniors in my community—live with dementia, and most are women. Programs like Finding Your Way are essential to seniors in Ontario.

It is clear to see that steps are already being taken to transform our programs and services to improve health. How can the action plan for seniors continue to implement these changes?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Thanks again to the member from Kingston and the Islands.

I want to highlight that the progress we are making speaks to the mandate letter I received from Premier Wynne. It is perfectly in line with the goals we have set out in Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors. Since 2013, we have put in place some 12 plans, programs and legislative initiatives, all in order to assist our seniors. For the first time, our seniors living in retirement homes can enjoy a very secure and safe living environment.

The member has mentioned the Finding Your Way program, supporting our people with dementia. We give \$11.5 million annually to support 265 elderly persons centres, supporting older women, people with dementia and isolated seniors.

Speaker, let me say that Ontario seniors have our firm commitment to continue seeking innovative ways to provide them with the best quality life—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

UNPAID LEAVE

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Premier. My constituent Art Boon is a decorated World War II veteran. He risked his life to help liberate Holland from Nazi occupation. Holland has invited him back to join in the 70th anniversary celebrations of that momentous event.

He needs his son Rick to care for him. Rick is a teacher; he needs an unpaid leave to accompany his father, but his request was denied. So far, over 2,000 people have signed a petition demanding the school board change its decision, but they appear unwilling to budge. I've spoken twice with the family. They tell me that without Rick at his side, it would be extremely difficult for Art to attend.

Will the Premier look into this matter before the Boons' plane leaves on Friday?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to say to the member opposite that at about 6 o'clock this morning, when I was running, I saw a Sun box and I saw this story on the front of the Sun.

I don't know the details. What I do know is that this is a school board decision. It has to be made at the level of the school board. We need to let that play out at the local school board. But I have to say that, just on the face of it, as I looked at the story on the front of the Sun, as I ran past, it seemed to me that it's something that should be able to be worked out at the school board level, and I hope it can be.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It has always been my hope that the school board would change their decision, but that hasn't happened. I fully respect our school board's role in the matter, including the responsibility for personnel decisions. But this is not a matter of personnel; it's about the public interest.

It's in the public interest for his son, a teacher, to recount this experience to his students for years to come. It's in the public interest for Art to attend this event.

Does the Premier agree? My constituents want to know if the Premier, as a former trustee and Minister of Education, thinks the board made the right call.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I will say to the member opposite is that I will have a conversation with the Minister of Education about that, and I will ask her what she knows, if anything, about the situation.

But the fact is that the decision does need to be made at the school board level. There's no doubt that it would be a terrific experience for this young man, but we respect the school board process. My hope, again, I say to the member opposite, is that it can be worked out at the school board level.

SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILDREN

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question this morning is for the Premier. Good morning, Premier. As you know, there's a preschool program for challenged children with special needs at the John McGivney Children's Centre in Windsor. Families from as far away as Leamington rely on this one-of-a-kind program.

A change in the provincial funding program leaves the McGivney centre with a financial shortfall of \$360,000. The families who rely on this unique program cannot afford to pay this higher cost.

Will you do the right thing, Premier, and step in and save this valuable and unique preschool program at the John McGivney centre?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member for the question. I'm very happy to follow up with him and chat about the specifics of the case he's raising. I thank him for the question as well, because as the member, I think, knows, we are in the midst of launching our Special Needs Strategy that will make it easier for families and children with special needs to access programs in the communities that they live in, that that can be coordinated through a central body, that they receive great care from the local services and agencies.

Part of that is also enhancing the screening program to make sure that we can get earlier screening done for children who need support. We're very happy with our investment and our strategy going forward. As I said, I'm happy to answer specifics of the case. Perhaps we can chat after question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Back to the Premier: Sometimes programs and services are so unique that they don't follow generic standards. The preschool program at John McGivney is such a program. It is special. It is designed for special children. Without this program, they cannot and will not receive the same care and attention if relocated to a regular program in a regular daycare centre. They won't thrive and inevitably they will be lost in the system.

Premier, if you have any semblance of compassion in your heart, will you commit to visiting this centre, seeing first-hand the needs of these special children, and meet their families? You'll see that there can be no better investment in our communities, no more humane investment in our communities, than investing in the programs that are delivered through the John McGivney centre.

Will you step up and save the program in Windsor at the John McGivney centre?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: When I was a parliamentary assistant to the then Minister of Children and Youth Services, it was my job to consult with families. It was my job to consult with service providers and researchers on the issues and opportunities facing families with special needs.

I can tell you, there is a tremendous amount of compassion put in by our government to develop this wonderful strategy that's evolving now. It's about making sure families have the right information, that they get the diagnoses they need, that kids are supported through transitions. We've invested more than \$468.6 million annually to support children with special needs. Whether it's speech language and others, we have tremendous programs through that.

I'm always happy to talk about specific cases. I can't talk about specific families, as you know, in the House. But we are very proud of the work we're doing. I'm very proud of the work I did to build this strategy and I'm very proud of our government, which has invested heavily in children with special needs and their future.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Associate Minister of Finance on a point of order.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, I would like to welcome in the gallery today, and those watching, members of my team: Michael Coe, my chief of staff; Drew Davidson; Marilyn Preston; David Gordon; Clancy Zeifman; and my legislative assistant, Tiffany Blair. I thank them so much for all their hard work and dedication.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Granville Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the record. Last week, I alluded to Maplefest as being last Saturday. In fact, it's this Saturday at 9 a.m., and there's still time. Hopefully, some of that maple syrup will end up in China.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Children and Youth Services on a point of order.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to welcome Debbie Thompson, a broker and past president from the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario, who's from my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East. Thanks for being here today, Debbie.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm not sure if it was mentioned this morning, but Peter Shurman is actually with us for question period—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's another member I'm going to have to put on my list for stepping on my introductions.

DEFERRED VOTES

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION
PLAN ACT, 2015LOI DE 2015 SUR LE RÉGIME
DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE
DE L'ONTARIO

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 56, Loi exigeant l'établissement du Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1146.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On February 17, Ms. Hunter moved third reading of Bill 56. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Anderson, Granville
Baker, Yvan
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad
Fife, Catherine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Forster, Cindy
Fraser, John
Gates, Wayne
Gravelle, Michael
Gretzky, Lisa
Hatfield, Percy
Hoggarth, Ann
Hunter, Miltzie
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Bob
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Mantha, Michael
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine

Milczyn, Peter Z.
Miller, Paul
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Naqvi, Yasir
Natyshak, Taras
Orazielti, David
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhara, Harinder S.
Thibeault, Glenn
Vanthof, John
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Clark, Steve
Fedeli, Victor
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hillier, Randy

Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
Martow, Gila
McDonnell, Jim
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia

Nicholls, Rick
Pettapiece, Randy
Scott, Laurie
Smith, Todd
Walker, Bill
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 65; the nays are 23.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1150 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome Cheryl Perry, founder of Testicular Cancer Canada, from Kitchener, to the Ontario Legislature. Welcome, Cheryl, and thank you for all the work that you do.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JEWISH HERITAGE MONTH

Mrs. Gila Martow: By proclaiming the month of May as Jewish Heritage Month, the province of Ontario recognizes the important contributions that the Canadian Jewish community has made to Ontario's social, economic, political and cultural fabric.

While Jews share a religion, they belong to all races of humanity and can be found in almost any country in which their freedom to practise their faith and celebrate their heritage is guaranteed. From India to Ethiopia and China to Morocco, an incredible variety of customs and languages demonstrate the complexities and fascinating history of the Jewish faith.

Everyone is welcome to learn more about the Jewish community at several outdoor events.

B'nai Brith is hosting the first Jerusalem Day Carnival at Yorkhill Park in Thornhill on May 17.

The 20th annual Israel Day Festival will take place once again at the Lebovic Jewish Community Campus just north of my riding of Thornhill. On June 7, join the energetic members of Na'amat Canada for tons of entertainment, food, crafts and lots of schmoozing.

The Ashkenaz Festival, the largest Jewish cultural event in Canada, takes place every two years at Harbourfront and other locations throughout Toronto. The festival, which features over 200 artists and performers working in music, theatre, dance, film, literature, crafts and visual arts, attracts a diverse multicultural audience of over 60,000 people. Ashkenaz has made Toronto the epicentre of the revival of the klezmer and Yiddish scene.

I look forward to seeing all of you at these events in all of our communities.

ORGAN AND BLOOD DONATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: One year ago I rose to speak about 13-year-old Jakob Beacock, who had passed away from an appendicitis-related illness. He was a spirited kid, loved deeply by his family and friends. Jakob was also a proud member of the Waterloo minor bantam Ice Wolves. His memory was recently honoured by the mem-

bers of the Waterloo region community, who organized the Beacock Cup, an NHL-style hockey game for charity.

I wanted to mention Jakob again today because April is Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Month. Last year Jakob's parents, Pam and Dan, decided that Jakob would become an organ donor, and at least four families have had their lives changed because of Jakob's gift.

Currently there are 1,500 people waiting for organ donations, so we encourage you today to become a donor.

I also wanted to mention the importance of giving blood. On May 22, with Canadian Blood Services, my office is organizing a blood drive at 10 a.m. at the clinic on Bridgeport Road.

My friend Peter Thurley is a wonderfully giving and active member of the Kitchener-Waterloo community. He was recently diagnosed with cancer and underwent emergency surgery. Like countless other cancer patients, Peter needs blood transfusions. Peter is now on the long road to recovery, and we're all thinking of him and his wife, Shandi.

We know that this is your toughest campaign yet, but we have faith you'll make it through this one too.

CARNATION REVOLUTION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise today to recognize the 41st anniversary of the Carnation Revolution, or, as it's known in Portuguese, *Revolução dos Cravos*, which was celebrated on April 25.

This revolution was a pivotal moment in the history of Portugal. On April 25, the Portuguese community celebrates the peaceful deposition of the authoritarian party *Estado Novo*, which had ruled Portugal from 1933 until its fall in 1974. What started as a military coup organized by the *Movimento das Forças* soon became an unanticipated and unprecedented campaign of civil resistance. What came next was not only the fall of the *Estado Novo* but also the withdrawal of Portugal from its African colonies in East Timor.

The name "Carnation Revolution" comes from the fact that what was supposed to be an armed revolution transformed into a population that took to the streets to celebrate the end of a long and unforgiving dictatorship and war in the colonies by placing carnations into the muzzles of rifles and on the uniforms of the army.

On April 23, I welcomed to the Legislature Manuel Pedrosa Marques, a colonel who took part in the Carnation Revolution, and also Carlos Morgadinho, a constituent of mine who runs the cultural association of the 25th of April. On April 25, I attended a gala dinner, along with Minister Charles Sousa, hosted by this cultural association, to commemorate all those that fought for this liberty.

It is with great pride that I stand here today as a beneficiary of the courage and compassion of so many hundreds of thousands of Portuguese men and women who helped transform Portugal into what it is today.

TESTICULAR CANCER

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to take this opportunity to speak about a disease which touches the lives of an estimated 1,000 Canadian men annually. Today, I'll be introducing a private member's bill entitled the Testicular Cancer Awareness Month Act to designate the month of April for testicular cancer awareness across the province.

I am introducing this bill as one step in the fight to address the fact that not only is testicular cancer the most common form of cancer in men between the ages of 15 and 34, but the incidence of testicular cancer has increased steadily over the last several decades. While more than 90% of men who receive treatment will ultimately be cured, the fact is if the disease is caught in the early stages, cure rates are even better, preventing the life-changing impacts that can follow diagnosis, sometimes sadly proving fatal.

I chose to designate April as Testicular Cancer Awareness Month because it is important for cancer awareness in Canada. April is recognized as Daffodil Month, the national fundraising campaign of the Canadian Cancer Society. I hope that this designation will bring attention to this particular form of cancer.

By taking one small step to designate April, and the creation of associated awareness campaigns, men in Ontario can better understand the impacts of this disease, and I think we can all support giving them a better chance to benefit from early detection and treatment.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I had the pleasure and honour to meet with our local agriculture producers in Essex county a couple of weeks ago. I just want to relay some of the information that I heard from them and acknowledge them and thank them for meeting with me: Brad Anger, Mark Balkwill, Leo Guilbeault, Brian Hyland, Kevin Smith, Dan Barrette, Chris Snip, Henry Denotter, Maurice Chauvin, Brendan Byrne and Gayle Bogart.

They talked about the ban on neonics. They are concerned about the recommendations made to deal with the pollinator health and our agricultural producers, that they've been singled out without a balanced approach being applied.

They talked about energy policy and access to reliable and affordable energy, concerns around privatization of Hydro One and the increase that those costs will incur on our primary agriculture producers in the province. They want to streamline access and streamline the regulatory regime for that. They want to see a plan for natural gas access that is well-nuanced and well-articulated through the province and not just simply a promise well into the future.

Infrastructure: In Essex county, they want to see Highway 3 expanded. They want to see the promise fulfilled by this government, something that will fulfill the legacy of my predecessor Bruce Crozier. Drainage support, rural education and health care, of course, are important issues.

Regulations: They want a fair and sensible approach to regulations that doesn't further put their farmers at a disadvantage to foreign competitors and foreign importers.

The Great Lakes Protection Act: They want to see some clear discussion around that. They would like to have their voices heard and concerns listened to. We hope that the government understands that.

I thank them for meeting with me in my riding.

BARRIE COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: On Friday, I had the pleasure of touring and making a funding announcement at the Barrie Community Health Centre. While I was there, the executive director, Christine Colcy, advised me that this year is the 25th anniversary of the Barrie Community Health Centre. Throughout these 25 years, the Barrie Community Health Centre has endeavoured to realize its vision of a healthy and engaged community.

As one of Ontario's models of team-based primary health care, the Barrie Community Health Centre serves individuals across the lifespan. Clients are able to access a range of primary health care services, including appointments with physicians, nurse practitioners and nurses; receive a consultation with a diabetes educator; attend a physiotherapy or social work session; and also connect with a community health worker. In addition, clients of the BCHC may attend a variety of group activities hosted at the centre or throughout our community, including the chronic disease self-management series, fitness for health and walking programs, as well as Kitchen Conversations, the art therapy program, Café Connect Drop-In, and many more.

While I was there, and earlier on a home visit with Dr. Kerstin Mossman, I was so impressed with the dedication and commitment of the staff and volunteers. I would like to thank them for the wonderful work they do in our community of Barrie.

1510

EGG FARMERS OF ONTARIO

Mr. Rick Nicholls: This year marks the golden anniversary for the Egg Farmers of Ontario. I want to personally congratulate the EFO for what they provide communities throughout Ontario and the world.

EFO is really about hard-working egg and pullet farmers. They're to be commended for their dedication to the success of egg farmers. There have been 14 different chairs in EFO's 50-year history, with this year's chair being Scott Graham. These hard-working farming families produce close to 200 million dozen eggs annually. These egg producers are continuously raising the bar of egg production, keeping us all very healthy. This year's celebration is all about respecting the past and embracing the present while building to the future.

In December 1972, the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency, CEMA, was established. In 1977, they launched

the first Get Cracking national advertising campaign, a catchy phrase that succeeded in correcting the steady decline in Canadian egg consumption that occurred since the 1950s. Many changes have occurred over the years, including changing its name from the Ontario Egg Producers to the Egg Farmers of Ontario in 2006.

Farm families continue to grow in Ontario. In 2014, the food bank egg donation program was established, providing 12,000 dozen eggs per month to food banks through the Ontario Association of Food Banks. Every year, the Egg Farmers of Ontario host a delicious egg breakfast here at Queen's Park. It begs the question, Speaker: "Who made your eggs today?"

So run to your favourite grocery store and buy your favourite dozen or so eggs. Don't delay. You better "get cracking." Thank you, Speaker.

EARTH DAY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members' statements? The member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We did get cracking—Grant Crack.

Earth Day is an annual celebration commemorated on April 22 in which events are held worldwide to demonstrate support for environmental protection. Over the years, a number of communities have turned it into Earth Week, where they spend a whole week conducting all kinds of activities.

In my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, we look forward to Earth Week each and every year, with many community events planned to engage and educate residents on the importance of environmental consciousness. This year was no different. Local schools, BIAs, residents' groups and many others organized and participated in various meetings, cleanups and the greening of our community.

I was fortunate to actively participate in several of these. I joined the children, staff and parent eco team at St. Leo's Catholic Elementary School, my alma mater, for spring bulb planting in the school's front gardens. Seniors from the parish community also joined us in the planting as part of their intergenerational gardening program. I was also pleased to assist the Friends of Queensland Park during their annual cleanup day, which was another big success.

Etobicoke-Lakeshore is a waterfront community, and my residents are great stewards of Lake Ontario. Each and every year, resident Alan Roy conducts an annual cleanup for Colonel Sam Smith Park, which I attended together with TRCA, Concerned Citizens for the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront and Friends of Sam Smith Park.

In Etobicoke-Lakeshore, we take great pride in this. We try to make each and every day an Earth Day, and that includes making every effort every day to reduce carbon emissions.

EARTH DAY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: This past Saturday, I was thrilled to attend the Earth Day activities at Ayr Public School in North Dumfries township. People from around my riding of Cambridge came together to celebrate Earth Day and to work to make our community a better place to live.

The activities began with a barbecue and vendors' market in the school gym. Local crafters had set up stands to sell green products. There were also stations for e-waste disposal and areas to donate used clothes for the less fortunate.

At the Earth Day event, I was happy to learn about and help with the Ayr Public School greening committee. The greening committee is working to improve the outdoor area for students to learn and play. Part of the greening committee's strategy includes building a sensory garden, which will include a variety of plants as well as a place for children to spend time reading outdoors.

Students from Southwood Secondary School, including my son Liam and his friends, volunteered their time all day to help clear out the area that will become the Ayr Public School reading garden, and they enlisted my help when I dropped by the activities.

Earth Day is a reminder to care for and respect our world. I would like to thank the heads of the greening committee, Stephanie Mason and Erika Gordon, as well as teacher Jacqueline Deacon from Southwood Secondary School, and the principal of Ayr Public School, Helen Turner-Fisher, for their ongoing dedication to greening and improving our community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Fedeli assumes ballot item number 50 and Mr. Hillier assumes ballot item number 63.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TESTICULAR CANCER AWARENESS
MONTH ACT, 2015LOI DE 2015 SUR LE MOIS
DE LA SENSIBILISATION
AU CANCER DU TESTICULE

Mr. Harris moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 93, An Act to proclaim the month of April as Testicular Cancer Awareness Month / Projet de loi 93, Loi visant à proclamer le mois d'avril Mois de la sensibilisation au cancer du testicule.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Michael Harris: Today I'm pleased to introduce the Testicular Cancer Awareness Month Act, 2015. The bill proclaims the month of April each year as Testicular Cancer Awareness Month to bring awareness and education about the serious impacts of testicular cancer and the importance of early detection and treatment.

PETER KORMOS ACT (REPEALING THE
SAFE STREETS ACT), 2015LOI PETER KORMOS DE 2015 SUR
L'ABROGATION DE LA LOI SUR
LA SÉCURITÉ DANS LES RUES

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 94, An Act to Repeal the Safe Streets Act, 1999 /
Projet de loi 94, Loi abrogeant la Loi de 1999 sur la sécurité dans les rues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The Safe Streets Act, 1999, is poorly conceived legislation that persecutes the poor by making it illegal to solicit money on streets, in parking lots, at transit stops or near bank machines. The bill repeals the Safe Streets Act, 1999.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Liz Sandals: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Education has put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I move that notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item numbers 52 and 57 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Education moves that notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item numbers 52 and 57 be waived. Do we agree? Agreed?

Motion agreed to.

1520

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Liz Sandals: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without

notice regarding this afternoon's and tomorrow morning's proceedings.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Education wishes to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I move that the orders of the House dated October 30, 2014, October 23, 2014, and October 30, 2014, respectively, referring the following bills to the Standing Committee on Social Policy, be discharged, and that the bills be ordered for third reading:

Bill 17, An Act to protect child performers in the live entertainment industry and the recorded entertainment industry;

Bill 20, An Act to protect pupils with asthma; and

Bill 28, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Hispanic Heritage Month; and

That one hour, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, shall be allotted to the debate on the motion for third reading of each of the bills; and

That on Wednesday, April 29, 2015, the first two items of business to be considered following routine proceedings shall be Bill 17 and Bill 20, respectively; and

That on Thursday, April 30, 2015, the first item of business to be considered during morning orders of the day shall be Bill 28; and

That in the case of a division being required on the motion for third reading of any of these bills, the division shall be deemed to be deferred until deferred votes on Thursday, April 30, 2015.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Education moves that the orders of the House dated October 30, 2014, October 23—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, I want to hear it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay—October 23, 2014, and October 30, 2014, respectively, referring the following bills to the Standing Committee on Social Policy, be discharged, and that the bills be ordered for third reading:

Bill 17, An Act to protect child performers in the live entertainment industry and the recorded entertainment industry;

Bill 20, An Act to protect pupils with asthma; and

Bill 28, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Hispanic Heritage Month; and

That one hour, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, shall be allotted to the debate on the motion for third reading of each of the bills; and

That on Wednesday, April 29, 2015, the first two items of business to be considered following routine proceedings shall be Bill 17 and Bill 20, respectively; and

That on Thursday, April 30, 2015, the first item of business to be considered during morning orders of the day shall be Bill 28; and

That in the case of a division being required on the motion for third reading of any of these bills, the division shall be deemed to be deferred until deferred votes on Thursday, April 30, 2015.

Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well done, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, thanks. It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

ASTHMA

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas one in five children attending school in Ontario have asthma; and

"Whereas a severe asthma exacerbation can—as in Ryan Gibbons case—be fatal when a child does not have ready access to their relief medication; and

"Whereas practical steps can be taken to limit exposure to asthma triggers and ensure children have easy access to their prescribed medication; and

"Whereas Ryan's Law mandates that school boards and schools develop a comprehensive asthma plan that limits students' exposure to asthma triggers and have ready access to their medication to ensure all students can attend school in an asthma-friendly environment;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislature to:

"Ensure that all members of provincial Parliament—particularly the respective party House leaders—make Ryan's Law a top legislative priority to ensure that it moves expeditiously through the committee review process and be brought back for third reading at the soonest possible date."

I agree to this petition, Speaker, and I thank the members of the House for doing so.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Mr. Michael Mantha: These are on behalf of the good people of Mattawa.

"Whereas a motion was introduced at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads 'that in the opinion of the House, the operation of off-road vehicles on highways under regulation 316/03 be changed to include side-by-side off-road vehicles, four-seat side-by-side vehicles, and two-up vehicles in order for them to be driven on highways under the same conditions as other off-road/all-terrain vehicles';

"Whereas this motion was passed on November 7, 2013, to amend the Highway Traffic Act 316/03;

"Whereas the economic benefits will have positive impacts on ATV clubs, ATV manufacturers, dealers and rental shops, and will boost revenues to communities promoting this outdoor activity;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We call on the Ministry of Transportation to implement this regulation immediately."

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and present it to page Ashton, who will bring it down to the Clerks' table.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I support this petition, affix my signature to it and hand it to page Chloe.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 per person that doesn't necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart meter program that failed to conserve energy, and almost \$700 more per household annually for unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

"Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating; and

"Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

"Whereas this uncompetitive tax will not impact businesses outside of Ontario and will only serve to accelerate the demise of our once strong manufacturing sector; and

"Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To abandon the idea of introducing yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses."

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Misha.

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas thousands and thousands of adults live with pain and infection because they cannot afford dental care;

"Whereas the promised \$45-million dental fund under the Poverty Reduction Strategy excluded impoverished adults;

"Whereas the programs were designed with rigid criteria so that most of the people in need do not qualify; and

"Whereas desperately needed dental care money went unspent and was diverted to other areas even though people are still suffering without access to dental care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly do all in its power to stop the dental fund being diverted to support other programs; and

"That the Legislative Assembly fully utilize the commissioned funding to provide dental care to those in need."

Of course I'm going to sign it; it's obvious. I'm going to give it to Joshua to deliver to the table.

FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees access to publicly funded French-language education; and

"Whereas there are more than 1,000 children attending French elementary schools in east Toronto (Beaches-East York and Toronto-Danforth) and those numbers continue to grow; and

"Whereas there is no French secondary school (grades 7-12) yet in east Toronto, requiring students wishing to continue their studies in French school boards to travel two hours every day to attend the closest French secondary school, while several English schools in east Toronto sit half-empty since there are no requirements or incentives for school boards to release underutilized schools to other boards in need; and

"Whereas it is well documented that children leave the French-language system for the English-language system between grades 7 and 9 due to the inaccessibility of French-language secondary schools, and that it is also well established that being educated in French at the elementary level is not sufficient to solidify French-language skills for life; and

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"Whereas the Ontario government acknowledged in February 2007 that there is an important shortage of French-language schools in all of Toronto and even provided funds to open some secondary schools, and yet, not a single French secondary school has opened in east Toronto; and

"Whereas the commissioner of French-language services stated in a report in June 2011 that '... time is running out to address the serious shortage of at least one new French-language school at the secondary level in the eastern part of the city of Toronto'; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Education has confirmed that we all benefit when school board properties are used effectively in support of publicly funded education and that the various components of our education system should be aligned to serve the needs of students; and

"Whereas parents and students from both French Catholic and French public elementary schools in east Toronto are prepared to find common ground across all language school systems to secure space for a French-language secondary school in east Toronto;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Education assist one or both French school boards in locating a suitable underutilized school building in east Toronto that may be sold or shared for the purpose of opening a French secondary school (grades 7-12) in the community by September 2015, so that French students have a secondary school close to where they live."

I fully support the petition. I will give my petition to page Abdullah.

TAXATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the introduction of the harmonized sales tax (HST) directly increased the cost of veterinary services and medications by five per cent (5%); and

"Whereas veterinarians must currently charge HST on nearly all the services and medications they provide, including essential life-saving procedures; and

"Whereas pharmacies in Ontario (e.g., Shoppers Drug Mart) must currently charge HST on medications prescribed to animals, but not on those same medications when prescribed to humans; and

"Whereas the cost of veterinary care is often an unfortunate key factor in determining the level of care an animal receives; and

"Whereas a lack of veterinary care can cause unnecessary suffering and/or loss of life for an animal;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario act immediately to exempt all veterinary services and veterinary medications (whether dispensed by a veterinary clinic or by a pharmacy) from the harmonized sales tax (HST)."

I sign my name to this and give it to page Ethan.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: I have a petition here signed by Colleen Walker, among others.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas northern Ontario communities are connected across long distances by bus service; and

"Whereas the ONTC bus service is the only form of public transportation available to many northern Ontario residents; and

"Whereas reduction of customer service and the closure of stations will cause deterioration of the overall system of public transportation of passengers and goods in northeastern Ontario; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario committed to providing enhanced bus service to alleviate the loss of the ONTC passenger rail service;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Ontario Northland Transportation Commission bus service must be enhanced to ensure reliable and continuous accessibility including uniform provision of adequate public transportation for all communities and people of northern Ontario."

I wholeheartedly agree, sign my signature and hand it down to page Joshua.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise this afternoon to read this petition that's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with this petition. I'm going to affix my name and send it to the table with Olivia.

OSTOMY SUPPLIES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the \$600 ADP ostomy grant has not been revised in a decade;

"Whereas Ontarians who require ostomy supplies are facing increased supplies costs that significantly affect their ability to pay for basic needs such as food and shelter;

"Whereas all Ontarians deserve to receive the care and supplies required to maintain their independence and quality of life;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To increase the ostomy supply grant under the Assistive Devices Program to appropriately reflect the increased cost of ostomy supplies for patients."

I agree with the petition and will be passing it off to page Ethan.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Ms. Cindy Forster: "Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints into the areas of hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities; and

"Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not allowing their Ombudsman to investigate any of these areas; and

"Whereas people wronged by these institutions are left feeling helpless and most have nowhere else to turn for help to correct systemic issues;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, children's aid societies, police, retirement homes and universities."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and will send it with page Samantha.

TERRY FOX DAY

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas on March 26, Bill 61, the Terry Fox Day Act, passed second reading with unanimous support" ...

"Whereas if passed at third reading before the Legislature rises in June, Bill 61 will proclaim the second Sunday after Labour Day in 2015, September 20, as Ontario's first Terry Fox Day;

"Whereas the second Sunday after Labour Day is the day on which the Terry Fox Run is traditionally held, and September 20, 2015, marks its 35th anniversary;

"Whereas on November 27, 2014, Terry Fox's home province of British Columbia passed similar legislation proclaiming this same day as Terry Fox Day" in BC starting in 2015;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly move quickly to pass Bill 61 at third reading before the end of the current session, ensuring that on September 20, 2015, Ontarians can celebrate Terry Fox Day."

I fully support the petition and give my petition to Joshua.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small

businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

"Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers' resources;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario's economy and create jobs in three ways:

"—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

"—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

"—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries."

I agree with and will be passing it off to page Megan.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING CHILD PERFORMERS ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ENFANTS ARTISTES

Mr. Paul Miller moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 17, An Act to protect child performers in the live entertainment industry and the recorded entertainment industry / Projet de loi 17, Loi visant à protéger les enfants artistes dans l'industrie du spectacle vivant et l'industrie du spectacle enregistré.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Miller.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to open by reminding the House that today is National Canadian Film Day. We have a tremendous film industry here in Ontario, and I hope many of you take the time to watch one of our province's fine productions this evening.

The history of the labour movement is that of workers mobilizing, advocating and agitating for respect and for fair pay; for adequate rest periods and limits on working hours; for a secure, stable and reliable paycheque; for the ability to retire in dignity; and, above all, for protection from exploitation.

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An integral part of that story since the Industrial Revolution has been the protection of child workers and the near-elimination of child labour in developed countries. We no longer expect our children to work to feed themselves and put a roof over their heads. We no longer send them down mines in order that their families might have just enough to subsist on. We take care of our children, as parents and as a society, until they are old enough to look

after themselves. We reserve their childhood for education, for exploration, for play and for growing up.

Now, child performers are one of the last exceptions to this rule that we keep our children away from work. But the work of a child performer is not like the work which we have long outlawed as an affront to our values. In many ways, acting and performing is play and exploration. It brings pleasure, joy and a little bit of magic to the performers as well as to their audiences. But despite their special nature, the live and recorded entertainment industries are still workplaces. We must ensure the highest standard of protection and respect for our child performers as workers and as children.

During second reading debate, my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga identified very excellently the loophole in our current laws: that child labour is illegal in Ontario, with one of the notable exceptions being the entertainment industry. Restrictions on working hours, the establishment of break periods and mandatory chaperoning are all measures in this bill that protect and enshrine respect for the child performer, both as a child and as a performer.

This is why I'm in politics, Speaker, and many of my colleagues, too. We're here to fight for fairness, for equality, for the protection of the vulnerable, and for the bright and better futures of our children and our grandchildren. We're here to make sure that those who put in the hard work and the long hours see the fruits of their labour in a fair paycheck, so that they can provide for their present, their future, and their families.

I am delighted today to welcome back to the Legislature some of Ontario's finest performers in the recorded and live entertainment industries. They've been a driving force behind this bill for years now, and they've never relented in their commitment to fair treatment for children.

Alongside them are many of the hard-working staff of ACTRA and the Canadian Actors' Equity Association. ACTRA, Equity and PACT have never wavered in their hard work and support for this legislation. I can't thank them enough for their ongoing commitment to the protection of child performers.

We have quite a list of attendees here this afternoon who have all played a role in pushing this bill forward. I'd like to offer an especially warm welcome and thank you to Sue Milling, Karen Woolridge, Art Hindle and Arden Ryshpan. And I extend my thanks to Lisa Blanchette, who can't be here today; she's out of the country. I'd also like to welcome Judy Barefoot, Karl Pruner, Barbara Larose, Clara Pasioka, Jack Newman, Tajja Isen, Theresa Tova, Katarina Tomasone, Heather Allin, Lynn McQueen, Sara Meurling, Elona Naqo, David Sparrow and Jasmine Spei.

I'd also like to welcome my wife, Carole, who believes in the importance of this bill as much as I do, and has made sure I've never given it up or thrown in the towel. Every time I threw my hands up in frustration, which was many times, she told me, "Take them down, roll up your sleeves again and get at it."

I'd like to thank legislative counsel Pauline Rosenbaum and her staff for their hard work and advice on Bill 17. I'd also like to thank my legislative assistant, Martin McKane, for his excellent work as Bill 17 pushed towards the finish line over the last few months.

I'd like to pay a special thank you to my retired executive assistant, Margo Duncan, who also is here today, for her ceaseless work on this bill—and putting up with me—and its predecessor. It is, sadly, a rarity for a substantive bill to make it this far. I hope that many of the well-intentioned bills proposed by my colleagues of all parties have the same opportunity over the next three years.

Of course, this bill would never have made it to third reading without the support behind the scenes of so many of my colleagues. I am truly heartened by the support I have received for the passage of Bill 17. There are a lot of people to thank for bringing this bill to third reading. I'm grateful for the advocacy of members of all parties. I can't thank them enough. I also list a few whose support has been invaluable. My colleagues in the NDP have been extremely supportive. I would like particularly to thank my party leader, from Hamilton Centre, who will be sharing my time with me today; our House leader, the member from Timmins–James Bay; and our party whip, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. My colleague from Toronto–Danforth has been a strong advocate. The current government House leader, who was formerly the Minister of Labour, has been very supportive of Bill 17. The official opposition House leader has pushed to get this through—thank you. The Minister of Labour has endorsed this bill—thank you. And I couldn't possibly forget my colleague from Parkdale–High Park, herself a child performer not too long ago, a dancer on a CBC show called *Time of Your Life*. She has also been a tireless advocate for the rights of child performers. Thank you.

In Ontario, unlike many other jurisdictions, we have failed to enshrine clear and direct obligations to the child performers in our live and recorded entertainment business and industry. We still don't have legislated hours of work, set breaks, play or resting areas; or requirements for appropriate tutoring, healthy snacks, and who can chaperone, tutor or act as a guardian. Bill 17 will ensure that child performers have the best and safest work experience while providing the entertainment industry with child performances necessary to tell the whole story.

We currently have a Child Performers Guideline to address these concerns in the province, but it's not legislation. The guidelines are good. They were worked out carefully by the Ministry of Labour, ACTRA, Equity and the producers. But guidelines are not laws. They are voluntary, not mandatory. There are firms and producers who ignore these guidelines at times and only pay lip service to them.

That is why I have twice brought this bill before this House. Protection of child performers should be the law in Ontario. It shouldn't be left to the goodwill of produ-

cers, and it shouldn't be left subject to negotiations that will happen every two or three years.

The Child Performers Guideline offers a solid foundation, but it must be enshrined in legislation so that the full weight of the law may be brought to bear when necessary. Moreover, the guidelines are silent on many aspects of the engagement of child performers. They do not cover provision of tutoring, exposure to moral hazards, or protection of earnings through a requirement to put a portion of a child performer's earnings in a trust for them. There are no requirements to appoint chaperones, provide breaks in the workday, or regulate travel to and from the workplace.

Bill 17 has been strongly influenced by the guidelines we currently have. It has also been informed by strong contracts negotiated by ACTRA, Equity, and the input during the committee review of my earlier bill in 2013. Bill 17 incorporates the lessons from the hours of discussion, amendment and negotiations we went through in that committee.

Bill 17 recognizes that the obligations to child performers are different in the recorded and live entertainment industries and sets out requirements separately for each of these performance areas.

Bill 17 also includes requirements to protect the income of the child performer. This is an issue I feel very strongly about, as do the performers who have fought so hard for this bill. Children should not be exploited for financial gain. They shouldn't be exploited for the entertainment of adults, and their earnings should be put away for their future, not the adults'. There are too many sad stories from the not-so-distant past, including famous child performers like Jackie Coogan or Shirley Temple, where a young performer reached adulthood and realized that they hadn't a penny to their name, and after over a decade of hard work they had nothing. The requirements for income protection in Bill 17 are absolutely necessary to ensure that our child performers are properly compensated for their work.

The protection of our children and the protection of the vulnerable from exploitation should not be labelled left-wing, right-wing, liberal, conservative, progressive or New Democratic issues. They are New Democratic values, but I believe they are shared by all public representatives in good conscience. They are the kinds of demands we make in a society, not as partisan or ideological groups.

I hope that members from all parties support the bill tomorrow. I have confidence in the goodwill and good conscience of my colleagues, and I thank you deeply.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I think it's a very, very special day in this House when a private member is able to move a bill this far along with the anticipation that when a vote is held in the House, that vote will probably be a positive one. It doesn't happen very often. I think for some of the newer members in the House, this may be the first time they witness it. As I said, Speaker, it's an

occasion that I'd like to see a little bit more often. Certainly, the example that's being set by the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek in this regard—the determination he has brought to this bill is something that really sets an example for the rest of us in this House.

I've been Minister of Labour for about a year now, and I inherited a number of things. One of the things I inherited was the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek's Bill 17. Pretty well on a daily basis, it seems, he would call to me down the hall and say, "Hey, Flynn, how's my bill coming? Where's my bill?"

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I kept telling him that when the time was right his bill would pass. I'm not sure if he believed that each and every day or if he thought that maybe the Minister of Labour was just making excuses, but certainly that's how I felt about this bill.

This is an excellent bill. I think that any one of us in this House who views this bill from the perspective of being a parent, of having your child being in the position in the studio or on the set where you almost turn them over to other people for the day—when they're not old enough to make a lot of decisions themselves and they still need the guidance of older people, including their parents. I think it's comforting to know that a bill is being introduced in the province of Ontario that's going to ensure that these young people are protected, that it's in the best interests of the children. It's in the best interests of the live entertainment industry and the recorded entertainment industry to allow this to come into law.

I've met with the member opposite to express our support for the bill. I was very, very pleased to see the all-party support it received last time, as the bill was strengthened as it went through the committee process. I look forward to working with the member opposite again to promote the best interests and the well-being of child performers.

We do have guidelines that have been in place for some time, and those guidelines advise; they tell these companies perhaps things that they should know. It gives them information. It gives them advice and tells them that they should act in a certain manner. As the member has rightly pointed out, some people, some of the better companies, choose to adhere to those guidelines; some don't.

Once this bill receives what I think will be a positive outcome and positive support from this House, that option will be gone. It will be the law in the province of Ontario, thanks to the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, with the support of all three parties. There simply is no choice in the matter. The interests of child performers will be paramount, and they will receive the protection.

We've done a number of things at the Ministry of Labour that I think the member would find comforting. We've conducted five blitzes, for example, on new and young workers' health and safety. We always include child actors when we're doing those types of investiga-

tions. We always know, though, that there's a lot more to be done.

We value the contribution of all those who work in the entertainment business. In the province of Ontario, I'm told that over 300,000 people earn their living in the entertainment business. Artists, we know, play an important role in building a strong and prosperous economy, and it should come as no surprise to people that artists often portray our own life back to us. The fact that you would have children involved in that makes perfect sense. What wouldn't make sense would be to have children involved in that industry who didn't have the protection of the act that is being proposed by the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

I'm really happy to support this bill. We're really happy to see the changes that were made at committee prior to the 2014 election. I believe that's going to ease the enforcement of the bill. It's going to be very clear in the rules around mental stress, emotional stress, providing healthy food, education and tutors, ensuring that they're being chaperoned while they travel, and the establishment of a trust fund for all child actors.

I really want to thank the member across the floor from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek for reintroducing this bill, for sticking with it and for ensuring that all of us have the opportunity to do what I believe is the right thing, and that is to support this bill. Congratulations, Paul.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure for me, on behalf of my Progressive Conservative colleagues, to profess our support for Bill 17. I want to thank the minister for his comments and also the kind words that the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek said about me.

When we talk about the member, I guess we all perhaps have candy-coated it a little bit. He is a bit persuasive in his nature, just a touch, especially if you ever get nose to nose with him. He can be really persuasive then.

All kidding aside, he has done a tremendous job with this bill. The fact that he reintroduced it, the fact that he feels so very passionate about the bill—I think we all could hear in his voice the passion that he has.

We come here to Queen's Park to protect the vulnerable groups in society, sometimes through legislation but mostly through our actions. We can, of course, all agree that child performers are one such group, and we can't let them be alone—and definitely, this is a grown-up world, so, as legislators, we need to put some legislation in place to be able to help them.

I don't know personally, but the entertainment industry has got to be a hard industry for anyone to deal with the unique challenges that it provides, but to be able to navigate through it as a child—I just can't imagine what that would entail.

A few months ago, as the House leader, I met with a number of groups—the Canadian Actors' Equity Association, and also the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists—about their support for this bill

and about their passionate plea that, somehow, the three parties, even in a majority Parliament, can sit down and agree on bringing this bill forward.

I see my friend Art Hindle there, who gave me a very passionate speech that day. I really want to thank you for being here to support Paul, and all the members who are in the gallery to support Paul today.

As the minister said, I think, in 2007, the Ministry of Labour had its child performers guidelines, but the initiative really remained exactly how the name implied: It was guidelines. I think we all agree, especially after the member's first attempt at this bill, that we need something a little more concrete. Perhaps we could agree that it would serve as a positive first step, but I think we all agree that today is the day that we'll finally take those steps to move this forward in terms of legislation.

It's not a unique issue. I know that in my riding, I have a number of groups. I'm thinking of groups like the Thousand Islands Playhouse in Gananoque or the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival in Prescott. Those live performances that I watch wouldn't be the same without those young actors and actresses being involved. I think we have a duty, as legislators, to ensure that they are treated fairly and that there is a legislative framework that we, in this House, can move forward on behalf of them.

We also have to think of the future generation of performers who are in our ridings. I can think of groups like my Brockville Operatic Society; the integrated arts program at Brockville Collegiate Institute; or even the local concert band. There are young men and women who are performing there now who may end up with a career in the arts. We need this, to be able to protect them.

Again, I just want to say something—I'm going to stray from my notes. I'm sure that the House leader for the third party agrees with me that it's a unique challenge. I've said this before about the House leaders: When we have debates about the House leaders agreeing, it may sound easy. It may sound like we can just get together and decide how bills are going to go through.

We all know that politics isn't easy. I think we realize now, after two incarnations of this bill, that child performers—it's not an easy vocation. We need to use our strengths here in this House to put forward some protection, and I think this bill goes a long way in being able to provide that.

I think that the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek has done an exemplary job of ensuring that we all understand the proposed bill, that we all understand the components that are going to be dealt with in this bill—the hazards of performance, the hours, the issue of companionship.

I remember hearing speeches from the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and also the member for Thornhill, I think, who spoke specifically about specific examples that we need to put top of mind when we deal with this legislation today.

I just want to say that it's a pleasure that we're here today, not just speaking on this bill but on Mr. Yurek's

bill, and Ms. Martins's bill tomorrow, and that we can all look at each other at this session of Parliament, regardless of our debates in question period, regardless of the debates that we'll see in committee, or the budget debates, and that we're able to tag three pieces of legislation, and especially this one. That is good public policy. That's policy that's not New Democrat or Liberal or Conservative. It's something that is helping our kids.

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I just again want to thank you for the opportunity to speak today, Speaker. Hats off to you, Paul. You're a great guy. I actually like your shirt today. It's very stylish, and a beautiful colour. I like that. Anyway, thank you very much, Speaker, and I look forward to further debate this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have to say, I'm very pleased to speak on Bill 17, the Protecting Child Performers Act.

I want to take a moment, as others have done, to recognize the members of ACTRA and Equity who are in the galleries today. They have worked extremely hard. These organizations have been very active in working to get this legislation passed over the years, and their organizations worked tirelessly to ensure that the rights of all people are being protected, that adults and children who work in film and TV and in the theatre and on the stage are being protected. Today, this is about children, but we know that these organizations work diligently day in and day out for all people in the industry. Thank you so much for that work that's ongoing.

I also want to thank my colleague, my friend, my neighbour from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Paul Miller, for his passionate pursuit of getting this bill to where we are today. I have to say that he has worked with dogged determination. I think everybody around here recognizes that. It's important for me as leader of the party to say to Paul a great big thank you—I'm sorry, to the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek—a great big thank you and congratulations, Paul, for the work that you've done.

All of us know how important the recorded- and live-performing industries are to Ontario's economy. In 2012, the industries brought Ontario nearly \$1.3 billion and 29,000 full-time direct and indirect jobs. I think it's important for the members opposite in the Liberal benches to take note of those numbers, because they're highly successful industries here in Toronto and here in Ontario that bring revenues and jobs to our communities.

Hamilton is a community that has gotten a lot of action, if you will—no pun—when it comes to these industries, and I know that many other communities around the province are also benefiting from the work that these diligent people do in their profession.

I have to say that it's a little bit worrisome that the 2015 budget actually cuts some supports that make Ontario such an appealing jurisdiction, and we're going to have to keep a very close eye on whether or not negative results do occur. I'm worried about what the budget

might do, but of course that's a debate for another time. Today, the debate is about child actors.

I have to say the fact that we lack legislation right now, that there are not legislated rules for child performers, is very troubling, Speaker, and I think it would surprise most people. I bet you most people in Ontario haven't the slightest clue that child performers are not in any way covered by legislation that protects them in the workplace. There are no regulations on hours of work, no set breaks, no play or resting areas necessary. There's no requirement for appropriate tutoring, for healthy snacks, for who can and can't chaperone, for who can tutor or act as a guardian.

Right now, all we have are recommendations, Speaker, recommendations that are in some cases followed and in some cases not. That's not good enough. These children are not working in factories, but that doesn't mean that we should ignore our obligation to ensure that they are working in an environment that is safe and respectful of their very specific needs as child workers.

Child performers not only spend their days learning their lines and performing their lines; they also must attend tutoring sessions to do their school work and meet the educational curriculum requirements for their grade level. For child performers, their days can be very demanding, both physically and psychologically, and working means time away from their friends and their families and regular childhood activities.

Fortunately, it's not difficult to create legislation that will cover off, or protect, child performers, and it will not be difficult for the recorded- and live-performing industries to comply with the new rules, Speaker, because for most companies, compliance with Bill 17 will mean either no cost or very low cost implications. In many cases, companies are already implementing many of the measures contained in the bill.

But the reality is, that bill needs to be enshrined, or those regulations, those guidelines, need to be enshrined in legislation. It's not good enough for them to be simply voluntary. In fact, British Columbia, Manitoba and many states in the US already have legislation of this type, and it's long past time that Ontario should follow suit.

Ensuring that there are proper, safe and secure areas for child performers to be tutored or to relax or to learn their lines is not difficult to provide when selecting a production venue. To sit down with parents or guardians and set out the terms of employment, tutoring requirements, income protections, hours of work, and to confirm adult supervision, is a pretty straightforward exercise, but it's an important one. Establishing a work schedule that is age-appropriate for the performers is simply the right thing to do. While this is already being done, as I've said, by many producers, it is important that it is done for all child performers each and every time they go to work, and Bill 17 sets out those rules clearly.

Other key provisions of the bill—I could go on, Speaker, but I know that there are other members of my caucus who wish to speak to this as well.

It may seem like a small thing, but children in the workplace is something, as the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has said, that we really don't think of, because we don't think we have children in the workplace anymore. We don't have them in the mines; we don't have them in the factories. But we certainly do have child performers, and we need to make sure that we're taking care of them. We need to make sure that the things that they're experiencing as they go to work—where there are, for example, violent films or violent actions or activities that are taking place on stage—that these things are not upsetting child actors; and making sure that they are getting the supports that they need to be able to distinguish these violent things. Because those things, over time, will add up, when it comes to the way that children experience them, and then live to have impacts as they grow.

Establishing clear rules that are consistent across the industry will make it easier for producers to actually hire child performers. It will save production companies time and money, and it will ensure that Ontario's children are getting the support they need. It will ensure that parents have peace of mind, knowing that their child's well-being is being maintained and tended to at all times.

I think everyone in this House realizes that this is a very good bill. We attempted to have this bill passed not so long ago. I'm very, very hopeful that the rest of the debate will continue, that we'll continue with the positive support we've had from both the government and the opposition, and that tomorrow morning, when it comes to a vote, there will be no unexpected occurrence—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Surprises.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yes, no surprises. This time we want no surprises, and we want to make sure that this bill actually succeeds in the vote tomorrow.

In closing, I want to thank, once again, the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for bringing this forward, but also for being so tenacious. It must be in his Hamilton blood. I can vouch for that, Speaker.

It's important that we protect our children wherever it is that they work or play. This bill helps us to accomplish that, and we look forward to finally having it pass.

Again, congratulations to Paul, congratulations to the government, to the opposition, and to ACTRA and to Equity and all those others who have participated in this very long journey, which I think will finally end tomorrow and protect children, starting when it receives royal assent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 17 at the third reading stage. First of all, I would also like to welcome the members of ACTRA and Equity to Queen's Park. I would like to congratulate the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for the tremendous work he has done. It's sound public policy. Congratulations, Paul.

Before commenting on this legislation, I would like to quickly mention how pleased I am that my colleagues,

despite partisan differences, have been able to work on this bill collaboratively. Differences remain—that's another hallmark of democracy—but I hope that when it comes to a vote, all members of this House vote in favour of this bill on the basis of its intent and merit.

1610

Before entering into politics, I was a teacher. While my current work doesn't allow me to see young children in classrooms every day, I do, however, take pleasure in that my mandate as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change is youth outreach, among other things. I have the opportunity to visit children in their schools to talk about environmental issues. I'm so impressed that they are very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the topic, more so than many adults. One day, as young people grow up and we adults age, these children will become our guardians; the future caretakers of our society and planet.

Perhaps too often people look to the future cynically. But I find, after meeting with those young people in my recent visits to schools, that I feel optimism for it. Working with young people and young students is extremely, extremely rewarding.

Fortunately, as a legislator, I can also help ensure that we, as elected members, do our part to protect our children from illness, from injury, from exploitation and from countless other risks they face, and we work proactively. This bill in its current form, if passed, would act as an employment standards act of sorts. But it is still more important, I believe, because it deals with children who are vulnerable, especially in the workplace.

Section 2, part 1, specifically mentions that “the paramount purpose of this act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of child performers.” The bill speaks to working conditions, hours of work, safety in the workplace, child nutrition and training. It prescribes measures to prevent financial exploitation of child actors in the entertainment industry, ensuring that adults are themselves taking responsibility for the child performer and that there is a sufficient number of supervisors.

As an educator first, I was particularly pleased at the mention of tutoring. Education, as all of us agree, is an invaluable tool in one's life, and it is vital that work in the entertainment industry doesn't discourage a young person from being strong and well-rounded.

I'm also pleased that there is a general agreement that any measures—whether prescribed in a contract or in this proposed legislation—that protect the child to the greatest extent will take precedence. This means that no matter what, the safety of a child performer is paramount, as it should be.

I will be voting in favour of this bill when it comes time to vote, and I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this bill. Congratulations to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek once again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is a pleasure to join the debate today for Bill 17. I must say how very proud I am of my

friend Paul Miller for his tenacity, his dedication, his determination and his heart for putting this forward. He knows I've been a supporter of his bill from day one, and I'm really delighted that he has this moment today to celebrate with so many of his key stakeholders and with, of course, his lovely wife, Carole, something he truly believes in.

I first became aware of this issue—a couple of years ago Paul brought this to my attention at a reception with ACTRA. It's really important that we talk about that reception because that was the first time I met Art Hindle. Art brought with him two young people that I see on a daily basis. I have a 10-year-old, so the television station's Family Channel and YTV are on a lot more than the legislative channel at my house. Yes, everyone is shocked that the legislative channel is not on at my house, but I guess they hear Mommy enough at home.

Art was kind enough to bring two young people to that reception. I must admit I was a bit star-struck. One was Michael Seater—remember, Art? Michael is on a show called *Life with Derek*, and it is my daughter's favourite show. She loves it. He also brought Adamo Ruggiero—I think I'm saying his name wrong—and he was on YTV. They did a star search, and he was on that show for quite a while.

I realized how important their protection was, and it was something that I had never thought about, ever, as a legislator. Perhaps it was ignorance. Perhaps all of us collectively thought that those protections were in place, because as the leader of the third party and Paul Miller stated in this House, and previously our colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga Michael Harris said, child labour is illegal in Ontario. Perhaps we thought, because there were protections in the United States and elsewhere in the world, and particularly in other provinces in Canada, that those protections were available to child actors and youth actors here in this province.

So that was the first time I had any experience, thanks to Paul—and I believe my friend Peter Tabuns was also there. I had the opportunity to see first-hand that the life of an actor, the life of a child performer, is maybe not as glorious as we think it is for that hour that they're on the screen.

A little after that, I must admit, I was shocked—everyone in this chamber has heard of Degrassi Junior High and Degrassi High. My colleague Mr. Yurek and I—I'm 40 and he's a little bit older than me; I won't say much older, but you are—are of the vintage of Degrassi Junior High.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We didn't go to school together.

One of our favourite actors when we were growing up—and we didn't have the wide array of television stations at the time—was to watch Degrassi High. About a year ago, we found out that one of our favourite actors, Neil Hope, had passed away, almost in obscurity. I got to thinking, had Paul Miller's bill and those protections been in place for him, the tutoring, the hours that they work, probably some mental health support, how to

manage their money—fiscal literacy is going to be incredibly important, particularly for child actors—perhaps things would have changed.

Now, I don't know, but I can tell you that that was an experience for all of us, as young people growing up in Canada, to watch that show, to identify with those youth actors and the characters that they played. To see a life end so tragically, when you think all is well because they were on television, I think was quite shocking.

I'm also pleased that the Minister of Labour spoke to this bill. I thought that had a great degree of class. He showed a great degree of gravitas. I'll tell you why that's important, Mr. Flynn: It's because, from time to time, we can be on this side of the chamber and we can feel like we're working so hard and we know something's wrong and we really want to fix it, and we're met with resistance. Today, the olive branch you're sending to our colleague Mr. Miller and the extension of your support for his bill, and by extension a bill that we all support, I think is very meaningful. I'm sure those who are here today from ACTRA, Equity and PACT really appreciate that.

As many have noted already, child protection is something that should be the first thing we think of as Ontario legislators, whether they're in our school system, whether they're on a worksite, whether we're talking about traffic safety. Children, I think, are the next generation. A few weeks ago, we had a bill on transgender conversion therapy, which this assembly supported unanimously because of the implications for children. We felt that that practice needed to be ended. There were children here in the assembly that day. I think sometimes the moments we all become very real in this assembly are when we actually stop talking about the issues adults talk about and start thinking about how we might want to protect a child.

Later on today, my colleague Jeff Yurek will have a bill called Ryan's Law that will protect children in school with asthma and ensure that their puffer and their access to oxygen will be made closer to them.

1620

I think this is a brilliant day for the Ontario Legislature. I think this is a day that I wish more members were actually able to be in the chamber for. I don't discredit the fact that they're off doing work in committee and taking meetings, but I think this is an example of when it really, really works.

I want to give a lot of credit today to the three House leaders: the government House leader, the opposition House leader and the third party House leader. In my experience in this assembly, I have never seen the three House leaders come together, particularly in a majority Parliament, in order to allow three opposition bills to move forward, two of which deal with the protection of our children. I think that's quite remarkable and I think it's something that we should try to do, if not every week—because I don't think that's possible—then certainly on an annual basis. These bills, particularly those dealing with child protection, are enormously important.

I can understand, for example, in the case of both Mr. Miller and Mr. Yurek, the frustration that they had consistently bringing these bills to the assembly, thinking they had gone that mile, that this bill would become law, and then it not happening. I can speak, I think, with absolute confidence in saying today that these three bills before the House as we debate today will pass into law tomorrow. That's a great feeling, and I think that's a great thing for Mr. Miller and Mr. Yurek and for others, to suggest that this Parliament is working.

I wanted to talk a little bit about what Bill 17 will do. Others have spoken about it, but I think it's really important to reiterate that the United States had these protections effectively since the 1930s. Other jurisdictions in Canada have had these protections as well.

We, in Canada, and particularly here in Ontario, have been home to some very big superstars, child actors. Ryan Gosling is from Ontario. Rachel McAdams is from St. Thomas. We have Robbie Amell and, of course, Drake; he was also with Degrassi. Sarah Gadon is from Toronto; Charlotte Sullivan; Shenae Grimes-Beech; Kevin Zegers; and, of course, one of my favourite actors, Michael Cera, who was born in Brampton. These are all young actors who have made their start right here in the province of Ontario.

We look back at the legacy of Ontario film. You all hear this all the time, so forgive me, but for the new people who are here, I grew up in a small town called New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, with how many people?

Mr. Steve Clark: A few.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You're not going to throw it out? With 10,000 people. So there weren't a lot of child actors or actors at all. When we were growing up and we would watch CBC or Switchback or all of those different things, that's how we knew what Toronto was: because we would watch TV.

Interjection: King of Kensington.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We would watch King of Kensington. We would watch these people and they would be in our homes. We had very few television stations then, and we would learn so much about this great province and this great country through the Toronto film and television market. We would learn about Mike Myers and actresses across this country. The fact that we didn't have these protections and that the United States already did is quite stunning—Lorne Michaels is from Canada. We'd never had these protections.

I think it's very important that the bill address the need to ensure our child actors don't miss out on educational opportunities. I know that the Minister of Education is here. I'm sure she's quite a big proponent of that, because every child in the province of Ontario should have equal access to education. I think that is the great equalizer. For our children, as they grow older, I think it's a solid basis for them in which to move on. I think that's why mandating tutoring is absolutely critical. Those children are working, in some cases, for 10 or 12 hours. They need the flexibility but at the same time they do

need an education, because at the end of the day, when the TV is off and the money, which may or may not be there—it doesn't really matter—it is what somebody knows so that they can get back on their feet again.

The bill is going to look to ensure that our young performers aren't overworked and that they aren't lacking in adult guidance, because at the end of the day we don't want those pitfalls. I can't stress enough the importance of financial literacy today for all of our kids, let alone children who are making maybe more money than I am this year but next year making nothing.

I think it's important, too, that there are these guidelines in order to help moms and dads who may or may not, for the first time in their life, be experiencing an industry they know nothing about. This bill fixes those loopholes and provides an extra basis of support for moms and dads who may be experiencing this out there. I'm really pleased this is happening.

Yesterday, we talked about the National Day of Mourning, and we talked about protections for workers in the labour market. We talked about preventing death. We talked about another thing, just briefly: We talked about post-traumatic stress disorder. I think we also have to have a bigger discussion on mental health. With this bill, it now brings us into that discussion, and I'm going to mention it. I think the enormous pressure children are under today, particularly those who are working and may not have the same societal supports if they're working and not going to a school—may have some mental health challenges, and I think it's important that we talk about those as well, in order to protect those children into the future, so they may have a very prosperous career as we move on. I don't think that any person is immune to it. I think we've seen, particularly south of the border, some of those challenges faced by many child actors. I think we need, as a Legislature, to be forward-thinking in this regard, and I think that we should have that conversation.

As I conclude, I want to say thank you for allowing me to be part of this debate. I think this is a very important piece of legislation, one that catches Ontario up to where it should be and where it should have been.

I want to really congratulate Paul Miller. I don't remember a member being as dogged for support on any piece of legislation as he was. It almost became sort of a running joke around here, because when he saw you, as the Minister of Labour said, he would ask you when you were going to ask your House leader to get this bill back on the docket, and for that, I truly appreciate it—because it did show. And I think he alluded to this: This isn't really a right-wing or left-wing issue; it's not a Conservative, NDP or Liberal issue; it's an issue that we must address, because it does deal with the protection of children, and it is one that I think is easily supportable by all political parties, by all Ontarians and certainly by this Legislature.

So congratulations, Mr. Miller. I'm very proud of you. I'm very pleased to have been able to speak to this bill, and I wish you much success.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I am delighted to be able to stand in my place today and say some nice things about my buddy Paul Miller. I did not know I had a speaking part in this play this afternoon, but I just so much appreciated everything he had to say and what has been said about his determination and how much he has really pushed this. He has been like a bulldog with a bone in our caucus, in this House—the comments across the floor.

I told you before, Speaker, about moving to Newfoundland in 1966. One of my best friends in high school was Kevin Noble, who played Joey. In fact, when Barbara Frum and *The Journal* first came on CBC the first night—Kevin was Joey in Newfoundland that season, and they had him on the first show of *The Journal*. David Ferry, a former executive with ACTRA—David and I and Kevin back at Memorial or even in high school. I had these little bit parts in plays, and David Ferry was bigger, and Kevin was even bigger. I followed their careers. I see David Ferry now in Hollywood productions. I'm so proud of the guy. This is a guy I used to drink beer with in high school, for God's sake, and now he's making a good deal of money, I'm sure, in Hollywood.

I was with the Canadian Media Guild for a long time at the CBC, and we had dealings with ACTRA all the time. At one time, I even thought there could have been some kind of a marriage between the two unions, but it didn't happen.

And what a treat: I've never met Art Hindle, but I see him in the audience today, and I feel like I know him because I've seen him on TV, in the movies. He's a Canadian icon, and here he is right here today. I said to my buddy Paul, "If they ever make a movie out of you, Miller, Hindle's going to play you."

1630

Earlier today, I had three meetings over the lunch hour. One of them was with the Ontario Clean Air Alliance and Jack Gibbons. We were talking about the horrific cost of repairing Darlington versus bringing hydroelectric power from Churchill Falls in Newfoundland and Labrador into Ontario. Joey Smallwood, who Kevin played, brought that electric to life at Churchill Falls. Unfortunately for Newfoundland, he didn't put an escalator clause in there. So Quebec is paying the price that Joey negotiated back in the 1960s. That's not a good thing, but hey, that's for another day.

I was only here—how long am I here, Speaker, a year and a half or so? One of the first months I was here, *Murdoch Mysteries* came. Remember that? We all had our pictures taken. I took the picture home and showed my wife: "Why didn't you tell me? I would have come to Toronto." It's one of her favourite shows. When I had room 357, where Ms. Forster from Welland is now, that's where the ghost threw somebody over the ledge. This Legislature is full of ghosts.

I just want to say—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're the ghost.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I am the ghost.

I want to say, Paul Miller, you are the best. Carole Paikin-Miller, you are the best, and thank you for sharing in his moment. Thank you for sharing him with us as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's an honour to have an opportunity to speak here for a few minutes on this bill. As others have mentioned, the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek has been lobbying, successfully. After this passes, Paul, you've got to lobby my bill. It's gender pricing discrimination. That's for another day.

Interjections.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I tried twice. I gave up after two times. But anyway, you're going to get it through.

I was listening to the remarks from other people and a thought came into my mind when I saw the guests here. Think of Toronto and Ontario: Toronto hosts the second-largest film festival after Cannes; it's the Toronto International Film Festival, known as TIFF. People come from everywhere. I've been lucky enough to see the premieres of some movies. The actors come, premiere the movie and talk about their movies.

I'm going to tell you about a few of the films that premiered here. One of my favourites was *Silver Linings Playbook*; *The King's Speech*; *Slumdog Millionaire* premiered here. There were children involved in that movie. If you haven't seen it, it's a good movie to watch.

Other movies are filmed in Toronto, a lot of movies, so you're going to have child actors in these movies—movies like *Chicago*, which won a lot of awards; *Crash*; *Finding Forrester*; *Billy Madison*, which is a movie about a comedian with his son—that was filmed here in Toronto; *Cinderella Man*, which is about a heavyweight boxer, and he had his wife and he had children as well—I think it was Russell Crowe who starred in that movie; there was also *Twilight*, which is one of those vampire movies; and *Brokeback Mountain*. They've all won awards. These are all movies that were filmed in Toronto or premiered in Toronto.

Our government, since it came here, has tried to encourage moviemakers to do their films here. TIFF also gets larger and larger every year. At some point, it's going to surpass the Cannes Film Festival and probably be the number one spot for premiering a movie.

Other people have spoken on the issues. Of course I support this bill. It's nice to see tripartisanship here. Bipartisanship, tripartisanship—we're all supporting the bill. I read it. I'm glad to see it get through today. It's an important bill.

As I said, others have spoken to it. The minister mentioned that we have a guideline, but this bill actually enshrines into law something that we legislators are responsible for. The guideline is here, and it's useful. We've used it for many, many years. But we're going one step beyond, now, and we're actually putting it into law.

I've read the bill. It's an important bill, when you think of how many children are involved in movies, in small scenes or in big scenes.

When I first was asked to speak to this bill, I thought of *The Wizard of Oz*. For some reason, that came to my mind. It was filmed in the 1930s; I forget the year exactly. Dorothy—I don't know how old she was in that movie. You mentioned Shirley Temple, but there were so many movies that involved people under the age of 18. Mickey Rooney was involved in a lot of movies, so many of them. He also didn't make any money. He started working at a very young age. Their careers were done when they were young adults.

So, in the future, when a film is done here in Toronto involving some young children—maybe next year, five years from now or 10 years from now—where there are going to be children involved, this law will be the guideline and the law on how these children are treated here in Ontario. I don't know about other jurisdictions, but Ontario now will have a very important law in place.

I'm congratulating you, Paul—the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. We look forward to it passing and becoming law tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to speak to the Protecting Child Performers Act. I want to congratulate the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. He has been like a dog with a bone. It is true. The Minister of Labour would hear from him and we all would hear from him, not only in the halls, but in question period you would hear, "What about those child actors," underneath all the other noise that's going on. I have to congratulate him for that.

I also know the member from Parkdale–High Park had put some measures forward earlier, in about 2007, that were also reflected in the bill as well. Also, the Minister of Labour, the former Minister of Labour and their staff—a lot of work went into this bill in terms of the amendments in December 2013. It does show how we can work together.

Now, I would also like to recognize the members of ACTRA and Equity who are here in the gallery today. I do want to spend a little bit of time on that, because I want to talk about the importance of coming and speaking to us, not only in committee, but in our offices, in our communities and here at Queen's Park. It's very important that people come and tell us what is happening in their industry or in their lives so that we understand it.

I was on general government, so when the bill was coming forward to committee, as the leader of the third party said—I don't want to say that I was clueless, but you have this perception in your head, you know, that it's art. So it's imitating real life, and we don't really see what goes into building that. I thought of Shirley Temple; I'm not that old, but that's what I thought.

So I want to mention in particular two people who presented to the committee. Shirley Douglas presented at the committee. She described a scene: "Imagine yourself

being 10 or 12 years old"—I haven't forgotten this but I can't remember it word for word; I don't have the *Hansard*. But she said, "You're on this movie set. There's lots of heavy equipment around. You're about this big. Everybody else is about this big. You're working with adults. You're young. You may be mature, but you're not experienced. There's lots of equipment. They're dangerous places. There's stuff on rails, there's heavy equipment, there's people moving around fast; they're busy and working on a deadline." It's not a really safe environment. I don't want to say that it's unsafe, but it's just that there are risks there if you are smaller. There are risks there if you are less experienced. So her description—I can't do it fully right now—really put in my mind what those risks were and the need to protect young people.

There was also another presentation. I can't remember the young woman's name—she's in the gallery today—but she spoke about the risks, and the discrepancy between what the expectation of the producers was initially and what came out later. So that really solidified for me, as a member, the risks to young people, especially young women. That committee hearing and your presentations were very helpful to me as a member, and I want to thank you and congratulate you for that.

It is really surprising that other jurisdictions have had rules around since 1930. I think that we're not going to go back; we're moving forward on this. I've always believed we'd get to this point. I think the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek would say that I always believed that it would happen. I would tell him that; he didn't always believe me.

1640

Just to speak a little bit today, we are talking about Ryan's Law. The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London is bringing that forward. Those are very important bills in doing the thing which is protecting our children. It shows what we can do when we work together.

I was talking to page Mira a little earlier about how it feels to be here in question period, because that's kind of like being on a movie set, I would argue. She said, "Well, at first it's really intimidating." And it is. It's really, really, very intimidating, Mr. Speaker. I think the second or third day she was here, I said, "What's the most interesting thing about this place?" I like to ask the pages questions, because they are young people working in an adult environment, and what do they think of all of us?

Laughter.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh no, it's good to get another perspective. She said, "You know, when you come here you think that there's all these people and they're important and they're talking, and it's a bit like the movies." And she said, "Then I realized that you're all like a really big family." And that's what we are: We are a big family. If families stayed together as long as we stay together, what happened in question period—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm not feeling the love these days.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, you should feel the love right now. Take it for what it's worth. Don't pass it up.

I just want to congratulate the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek again. I will mention—not to curry favour with the leader of the third party, but my mom is from Hamilton, so half of my blood is from Hamilton. The other half is from Winnipeg, so you figure that out. I'm very happy for you, I'm very proud for this Legislature today. I'll be proud when we debate the second bill. I look forward to the bill getting passed. Thank you for all your hard work.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Since the love is still flowing in this place, Mr. Miller, Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, has moved third reading of Bill 17, An Act to protect child performers in the live entertainment industry and the recorded entertainment industry.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Carried.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'm sorry. I didn't hear them. Forgive me.

Well, then, seeing as how there was a nay—maybe a little louder next time; or let me turn this up just a little more. Seeing as how there was a nay, all those in favour will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

A recorded vote being required, pursuant to the order of the House earlier today, this vote is deferred until deferred votes tomorrow, April 30.

Third reading vote deferred.

RYAN'S LAW (ENSURING ASTHMA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS), 2015

LOI RYAN DE 2015 POUR ASSURER LA CRÉATION D'ÉCOLES ATTENTIVES À L'ASTHME

Mr. Yurek moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 20, An Act to protect pupils with asthma / Projet de loi 20, Loi protégeant les élèves asthmatiques.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, I'm proud to rise today and debate third reading of my private member's bill, Bill 20, Ryan's Law (Ensuring Asthma Friendly Schools). First, I'd like to take a little bit of time and acknowledge the individuals who helped bring this bill to this point in time and hopefully passage for tomorrow.

I'd like, first of all, to give thanks to Speaker Dave Levac, who gave me a little bit of guidance on this bill. Dave brought through Sabrina's Law a few years back and had gone through basically the same process I have gone through, and he gave me some key pointers.

I'd also like to thank the three House leaders in this Legislature, who worked really hard at ensuring this bill returned back for third reading. In particular, I'd like to thank my House leader, Steve Clark, from Leeds—Grenville—his determination at ensuring this bill got back to the Legislature. I'm truly thankful.

I'd like to thank the many MPPs in this Legislature who have been very supportive of this bill through each of its stages; the Ontario Lung Association, which is here today; and the Asthma Society of Canada, which has also been—both of those organizations really lobbied on behalf of this bill with the various House leaders.

I'd like to thank my staff, both in St. Thomas and here in Toronto: Whitney McWilliam, who's here today from St. Thomas, and Kyle Dicker in my office in Toronto. Two in my office in St. Thomas, Trish Fifield and Marlene Bainbridge, couldn't make it. Someone still has to run the fort there.

I also want to give thanks to my previous staffer William Ross, who was there the first time we brought this bill to the Legislature and who has moved on to greener pastures.

I always like to take a few minutes and thank my daughter's teachers for everything they do with her and give them a shout-out, because I think it's important that I'm quite proud of the work and guidance they've shown my daughter, who is now in grade 5. I'm very proud of her accomplishments. I'd like to thank Mrs. Keogh, Mrs. L'Heureux, Mrs. Burgess and Mrs. Marcinkiewicz, who taught my daughter for two years in a row—not because she failed or anything. She passed her class, too, and moved up another grade.

Mr. Brock Austin: I found it amazing that he taught me grade 8 and was able to teach my daughter. He's still teaching. This year, it's Mrs. Roy-Kaufman. I won't forget my daughter's French teachers, the O'Gormans: Mr. and Mrs. O'Gorman. My daughter's quite taken aback with French, and I thank them for guiding her, heading that way.

I'd also like to thank the principal of Monsignor Morrison Catholic School, Mrs. Giampa, and, of course, the lady who runs the whole school, the secretary of the school, Mrs. Walt. You can't do anything unless you go through her. So thank you very much for what you do for my daughter and all the kids at Monsignor Morrison.

In particular, I'd like to thank Sandra Gibbons, who's here today. Thank you, Sandra, for coming in today. You've shown such strength, courage and determination to ensure that this bill reaches this part. Without you, this bill would not be here today. I just want to let you know that you're a very strong advocate for all children with asthma. So thank you very much for being here today and thank you for the support.

In October of 2012, Sandra faced every parent's worst nightmare: Her son, Ryan, who was a grade 7 student at Strathroy Public School, had an asthmatic attack while at school and, despite the best efforts by medical staff, he passed away. While his 12 years here were far too short, in that time, Ryan made an impression on those

around him, who remember him as a fun, lovable boy who had an affinity for electronics and gadgetry. The news shocked the community, which came in the days and weeks afterwards to mourn the loss of Ryan.

I'm a parent, as I mentioned earlier—my daughter—and many others in this chamber are parents. We can't begin to imagine the pain associated with losing a child, a pain that I'm sure Sandra now lives with every day. But Sandra has courageously come forward to share her story. She began a partnership with the Ontario Lung Association to get her message out and started a petition asking for asthma-friendly schools that has garnered thousands upon thousands of signatures.

When I met Sandra, her story was compelling. Her request for change was common sense. Ryan's Law provides the solutions for our school system to make schools safer for children with asthma. I want to take this moment again to thank and recognize Sandra for her courage and commitment on this issue. Thank you, Sandra.

I've received many stories throughout the province from parents in regard to their children and the inaccessibility to relief medication at school. Some parents have even resorted to hiding the relief medication in a school bag in order for children to have access to the medication in case of relief.

Sandra's is not the only story that's come by me, but I'll tell you another story in my riding that occurred that I heard during the last provincial election.

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I had a mom come up to me and thank me for Ryan's Law because her daughter has asthma. A year ago, her daughter was on the school bus heading to school and underwent an asthmatic attack. Because of the rules of her school, she was not allowed to have the inhaler on her, so she didn't have it in her backpack. Her daughter had to wait until the bus reached the school, get off the bus, and go in the school and find the principal in order to get her medication.

Thank goodness it wasn't as severe as Ryan's. However, if you have ever suffered an asthmatic attack, just imagine breathing through a straw continually for as long as it took to get that reliever.

This proves to me, not only with one case—it's across the province, and Ryan's Law is definitely needed.

Sandra and the Lung Association first approached me about doing a private member's bill in the summer of 2013, and I began my research on asthma policies throughout the province. It has become clear to me that policies vary from school to school, from school board to school board. Certain schools do have exceptional policies, and I will call out the Halton school board, which has a policy they created that we've modelled Ryan's Law after. This is a policy that works and has successfully made their schools asthma-friendly. Unfortunately, that doesn't span the province.

Ryan's Law seeks to provide policies that include a child's right to carry their relief inhaler at all times while at school, with their parent or guardian's permission. Asthma, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is the most chronic

condition among children, and as many as one in five children in Ontario have asthma, or 20% of our kids.

Children with asthma can lead happy, healthy lives if their asthma is managed properly by using appropriate medications and avoiding or controlling exposure to asthma triggers.

If they are controlling their asthma, which we're sure they're trying to do, they don't need their relief inhalers. But unfortunately, as seasons change, as colds and flus come up, there comes a time when they do need access to these relief inhalers, and you can't predict when you need one of those inhalers.

Reducing exposure to asthma triggers assists in reducing absenteeism. It reduces classroom disruptions and allows for fuller participation in physical activity. The intent of Ryan's Law is to ensure that all school boards develop and maintain asthma policies that are consistent across the province. This includes strategies to reduce the risk of asthma triggers; a communications plan for the dissemination of information on asthma; and regular training on dealing with asthma.

Ryan's Law also ensures that any student 16 and under will have his or her parent or guardian's permission to be allowed to carry his or her asthma relief medication while at school, while those over 16 can just do so.

It has been a long journey. Ryan's Law was first introduced in November 2013. It passed second reading and went through committee, but unfortunately, due to the spring election last year, all bills were erased from the order paper. We had to begin again. After the election, I reintroduced Ryan's Law for first reading in July, and, thankfully, it passed second reading in October 2014.

To increase awareness of the bill, passryanslaw.com was created, a website which has had a tremendous response. We've had 1,000 supporters, 351 endorsements, and hundreds of online signatures on the petition.

There have also been a number of endorsements, and I'll share a few, if I have the opportunity to do so, Mr. Speaker.

I have an endorsement here: "The members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, OECTA, have had an opportunity to review Bill 20, An Act to protect pupils with asthma. We understand that the bill would require every school board to establish and maintain an asthma policy that, among other things, would include measures to reduce asthma triggers.

"The bill also protects school board employees from damages for an act, or an omission of an act, executed in good faith.

"OECTA supports any measure that will keep students and board employees safe and healthy. We believe school boards should have transparent system policies across the province that address such problems as asthma.

"It is for this reason we support MPP Jeff Yurek's private member's bill."

Mr. Speaker, I have an endorsement that the Elgin county council "supports this private member's bill"—Bill 20—"Ryan's Law (Ensuring Asthma Friendly Schools)," 2014.

"Signed,
"Warden Dave Marr."

I also have the Toronto Anaphylaxis Education Group fully endorsing my bill: "We understand the work of educating schools about asthma cannot and should not be undertaken by parents alone. We urge the Ontario Legislature to once again lead the way by supporting Ryan's Law to make our schools safe places of learning for students with asthma."

I also have an endorsement—many more; I just grabbed a handful as I came down to speak today—from Allergan, a company which deals with allergies. Many people who do suffer from asthma do have allergies, which cause the reaction to occur in their system which constricts the breathing airways, which is why you need the reliever medication, usually a Ventolin or Bricanyl inhaler, which will open up the airways and allow you to breathe easier.

Those are a few of the endorsements I do have. I just want to thank everyone who has put their endorsement forward. I really appreciate the county of Elgin, the home area of Sandra and me, our own county, for bringing forward that motion.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a long road to reach the point we have today with Ryan's Law, and I want to take the opportunity to encourage every MPP to support it. I have seen throughout this whole process that they've been quite supportive. I thank you very much that we're able to put our partisanship aside and allow an opposition member's bill to come forward for third and final reading.

Ryan's Law is important in creating asthma-friendly schools across the province of Ontario. I think Ryan's Law is important. Sandra thinks Ryan's Law is important.

It's my hope—after question period tomorrow, when we vote for a final vote on Ryan's Law, with all-MPP support, and it is enacted into law, creating safer schools for 20% of the children in our school system—that everybody throughout Ontario will know how important Ryan's Law is to the future of our province and for our children today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'd like to begin this afternoon by commending the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London for his advocacy on behalf of students with asthma in Ontario.

Speaker, I believe the member shares our government's commitment to the health, safety and well-being of all Ontario students. I'm aware of the tragic circumstances surrounding the heartbreaking passing of Ryan Gibbons, and I'd like to express my deepest condolences to Ryan's parents, family, friends, everyone who has been so involved in working with Mr. Yurek.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge Sandra Gibbons, without whose advocacy this wouldn't be happening. Ryan's mom is here today. We really do appreciate the work that you've done. As a mother and grand-

mother, I know that the death of a child is not something that any parent should have to go through, but in the wake of such a terrible tragedy, Sandra has demonstrated such incredible leadership in working to improve the safety of all the other children in Ontario living with asthma. Sandra, please know that your actions really have made a difference.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank George Habib, president and CEO of the Ontario Lung Association, and his dedicated staff for all of the assistance that they have provided to my ministry to date.

Speaker, the health and safety of our students is something that our government takes very seriously. Over the past decade, we've developed a number of initiatives to support student well-being and to ensure that when they are in school, they are safe. These initiatives have focused on healthy eating, increased physical activity, better mental health supports and injury prevention.

And we have supported the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, known as Ophea, as they have reviewed how prevalent medical conditions are managed in schools. I know their work on this topic was recently completed.

While this legislation is an important step to support the well-being of students with asthma, the government's broader vision is to support the well-being of all children and students. We believe that a more comprehensive approach to the management of prevalent medical conditions would better support all students. That's why the ministry remains committed to moving forward with a comprehensive approach to address prevalent medical conditions, including asthma, diabetes, anaphylaxis and epilepsy in Ontario schools. To that end, I would like to thank the Canadian Diabetes Association, Anaphylaxis Canada, the Asthma Society of Canada and Epilepsy Ontario, all of them, for their leadership in moving this approach forward. We plan to continue to utilize their expertise and knowledge on this important work, in addition to input from our partners in all four publicly funded education systems and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, to develop a comprehensive approach to prevalent medical conditions.

1700

While we are here today in support of Ryan's Law—and we are here to support Ryan's Law—and the protection it will provide children with asthma in our schools, we will begin work immediately to have a comprehensive approach in place to protect children living with those other diseases which are not covered yet by other specific laws. So we are supporting Ryan's Law, but we understand there are other diseases, so we will continue to work with Ophea and the other stakeholders to get comprehensive policies in place that will deal with all of these things. Because, no matter what the disease, parents deserve to know that when they send their children to school each day, they will be safe.

Speaker, once again, I'd like to thank the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London for his efforts and his hard work. As he mentioned, this law got all the way

through second reading before we had an election and then all bills fall off the order paper, and he had to start over again. But what did happen, when the bill was in committee last time, was that there were some government amendments that were made to the bill to make it easier to implement in schools. I'd like to thank the member for when he re-tabled the bill last fall, he actually tabled the version that had been amended in committee. That's been very helpful, enabling us to support it, because we know that the version that is coming forward is one that we will be able to implement in Ontario schools. So I want to thank the member for his very wise, collaborative approach to making this happen.

Thank you to everybody who's been advocating for asthma, and thank you to our other partners who have been advocating for a variety of other diseases. We will get the rules fixed so that we eventually end up with everything covered, but today is a day to celebrate dealing with kids who have asthma.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: Before I speak on Ryan's Law, I want to take the opportunity to commend my colleague Mr. Yurek, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, for bringing forward this bill and really taking the steps to ensure that our children are safe at school. His very hard work and his dedication to this cause will really help children that have asthma receive the support and protection that they need and deserve. I appreciate his kind words earlier about the three House leaders, and having to have a deal that goes forward that would help this bill and Mr. Miller's bill, and Ms. Martin's bill tomorrow, to move forward.

I just want to speak a little bit about Jeff as a member. He has done an exceptional job with this bill. To go through the minority Parliament and have a bill go through committee and then ultimately die on the order paper is frustrating. Anybody who has been in this place for any period of time has experienced that—has experienced having a bill or other bills that you support or that your constituents support that just don't make it, and it's so sad.

The other thing is, this bill, in a sort of indirect way, has a special meaning for me. My son now is 26 years old; he's an Edmonton city police officer. But 26 years ago—it wasn't asthma, but it was his peanut allergy that he had. It was really—I guess the right word would be frustrating in terms of dealing with school boards and trying to educate them on the importance of having that EpiPen close to him at all times. I have to tell you that I worried pretty well every day that he was in public school or high school about something that would happen. I have to tell you, I had parents come up to me and give me a hard time about the restrictions that were placed upon them because of his allergy. I talked about the importance of making sure not just my kid but all kids were safe.

Sandra, I have to tell you, you're a wonderful woman. I don't really know a lot about you other than the good

things Jeff says, but I really have to say that to keep Ryan's memory alive and to be so tenacious to get this bill passed—God bless you. You are such a good mother and such an amazing parent to be able to be here today to support Jeff and to see Ryan's legacy enshrined in legislation. I want to thank you for being here and I hope you're here tomorrow for the special day that we're going to have. Thank you so much for being here.

Speaker, I think I'd get in trouble from the Lung Association or the asthma society—they do bombard us with all these wonderful statistics, and it is a big issue in our schools. Although I'm not the pharmacist that Jeff Yurek is—I refer to them as “puffers” and “relief inhalers.” He had a couple of technical drug terms there about what they were. He was losing me. That was the only time you lost me in the speech, when you were becoming the pharmacist rather than the legislator, talking about the specific drugs that would be used.

I think we all understand the importance of this. The report that I think we've all received from our stakeholders is from Ontario's chief medical officer for the year 2000, where the importance of educating staff and students about asthma was stressed, making staff aware of students with asthma and ensuring that medication is readily available.

Here we are—it's hard to believe—15 years after that report, and we still haven't had legislation that's passed. It's amazing to me that that's where we are. We all know the chronic condition that asthma is in our children. The statistic that the Ontario Lung Association has given all of us—I shouldn't be reading it; it should be engrained in my brain—is that one in five students in our Ontario schools have asthma; 20% is a high figure. Although it's common, we all know, with Ryan's story, that it can't be taken lightly. It has to be known, it has to be understood by our educators, and it can be fatal.

Jeff, you've done a great job in educating us about Ryan and his story; you've helped us, through this bill, get to know Sandra and the people of your riding; and I think it was great that you had an opportunity to really put into legislation a bill that is good public policy. Unfortunately, it was a heartbreaking incident that caused this bill to come to our floor, but it's a bright spot in this legislative session for us in this party to have one of our colleagues break through the Liberal majority and actually have a bill that means something, that shows that we can, in this place, really take what the Premier said in her throne speech that we can actually put some bit of partnership before partisanship—that we can, in an afternoon for two hours and in a morning for an hour, framed between budget debates, be able to have a frank discussion about three bills that need to get passed.

The statistic regarding asthma from the chief medical officer shows that 15 years is 15 years too long—15 minutes is too long, to be quite frank. I'm just very pleased that we can have a bill that is framed, as the member said, from an existing policy within our school system. I believe he said it was the Halton board that has this policy, and we were able to take that, put it into a piece

of legislation and pilot it through committee. I think we realize that part of what was good about the minority government was that we were able to test a few non-government bills and have them actually go to committee. We haven't done that yet. For those new members in the back row, we were able to take bills from all three parties and at least give them that lens from all of us, at least have one or, in some cases, two days of clause-by-clause hearings where we could have that debate, where we could allow people from our ridings to come forward, where we could allow our communities to correspond with us—as the member read out today, just a snapshot of people in his community that were supportive of his bill.

1710

Just like we did with Mr. Miller's bill, with child performers, we can't let these young people—20% of kids in Ontario schools—fall through the cracks. We have to allow them to have all the tools that are available to them—their puffers, their inhalers or whatever the technical term that Mr. Yurek used. We have to have them not just close to them; we have to have the people around them understand their importance, understand that saving those precious lives has to be paramount; and we have to make sure that our policies in Ontario are sympathetic to that.

So I want to thank the member for re-tabling this bill, for having it here today. I'm proud to be able to play just a small part in this debate. Congratulations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to also welcome Ryan's mother here, Sandra. There's nothing, I think, that's tougher for anybody in life than to lose a loved one. The fact is that you are taking a tragedy and making it into a positive, so that no other parent may have to suffer the loss that you suffered. On behalf of all three parties, your courage and what you're doing for your son, who's probably looking down today from heaven with a little bit of a smile on his face, knowing that no other child is going to have the same thing happen to them—so I want to say, from the bottom of my heart, thanks for doing this. There are a lot of other families that are thanking you today, as well. Thank you very much.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to the bill today, Ryan's Law. As you know, this bill seeks to make sure there are plans and procedures in place to protect children in our schools who suffer from asthma. It also seeks to make sure that our teachers and our principals have the proper education when it comes to understanding asthma and to make sure our children get their medication.

I know that the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London has been working very hard to get this bill passed through this Legislature and I'm extremely happy today to stand and support it.

When I look at this tragic story of Ryan Gibbons, we understand why this clear policy is necessary. I don't think anyone blames the teachers in this situation, but the patchwork of policies that exists around asthma medication becomes a major concern. We hear stories of parents

hiding their puffers in their kids' backpacks in some areas or having them locked away. When our children's health is on the line, there should be no confusion over the regulations. They need to get proper protection and their health should be absolutely the first priority. This is a discussion that has to involve the doctor, the children and the parents of the children.

I know that the Ontario Lung Association also supports this bill. In fact, I see some of their suggestions in this bill. I know that they have recommended that those suffering from asthma work with their family doctors to create an action plan in case an attack should occur. Even if someone believes they are not at a high risk of an asthma attack, these plans are incredibly important.

This bill also requires the principals to work with individuals to create a school plan should such an attack occur while they're at school. Considering how much time children spend in the classroom, this should really be a no-brainer. On top of that, it will finally bring together an action plan created by the doctor to protect children at home and at school.

I can't imagine there would be any opposition to this. A principal working with a doctor and working with the parents is fundamentally the way a community should care for its children.

It's important as well to note the role the doctor must play in this. Of course, our principals can create an action plan for the school; they know the facility well. But they are not medical professionals. When I asked in my riding of Niagara Falls about what kind of regulations were in place around asthma, the answer was a bit tougher than I imagined. There are some asthmas that are caused by seasons, some that are caused by triggers, some that are severe, and some where they don't bring puffers. The principals are definitely willing to do whatever it takes to make sure their schools are safe, but it's the doctors who are the professionals. So long as the responsibility is on the doctor to create a proper medical plan and work with principals to make sure it's properly implemented, we can solve these concerns.

By doing this, we can make sure that our children are never at risk and that proper action plans are available in areas where they spend most of their time. This should be the absolute priority of this assembly.

I can remember when these same things were happening around peanut butter in our schools. We heard stories of children who were deadly allergic to peanut butter, yet there were no regulations around it in our schools. It wasn't until there was a tragedy, the loss of a young girl named Sabrina to an allergic reaction, that regulations were finally put in place. It was unacceptable then, and it's unacceptable now.

I can tell you today what occurs with peanut butter allergies in our schools following Sabrina's Law, and I think it's important that everybody listen to this: Every single year, every member of the school staff is required to be fully trained on what to do if an allergic reaction to peanut butter occurs: the teachers, the administration staff, the janitorial staff—everybody. They have to sign

off that they're trained. They have to renew that training every single year, and they have to document that they received it. If a child has an allergic reaction to peanut butter, they're fully equipped.

Yet if a child with severe asthma has a full asthma attack, that training isn't there. When our children's health is at risk—and you're going to hear me say this a few times during this speech, my 10 or 15 minutes—we should be moving as quickly as possible to solve the issue.

Before I started to talk on this, I went to my wife, Rita DeLuca, who's a principal. I asked her, "What do you think of the bill?" She said that it should have been in place a long time ago. I think it's important to understand that the principals, the teachers—everybody—support the bill because they all care about the kids.

If we have reason to believe a child is in danger in a school, we have a responsibility to act. In the case of asthma, the parents are telling us there's reason to believe that there are gaps in action plans and that dangerous situations are existing. Who would know better than the parents? If that's the case, I can see no reason why we shouldn't support this bill.

1720

There are also serious concerns over being able to get their puffers. In some schools, the puffers are locked up in the office. This is because staff are required to administer the puffer, and then detail the dosage, any effects and anything related to it.

The problem is: What happens when the office is locked? What if you have to unlock the office and then unlock the area where the puffer is? It's easy to see why this is a tragedy waiting to happen when this happens in an emergency situation.

With EpiPens, students keep one in their locker and one in the office, so this concern is removed. Working with doctors and parents, there should be no reason why EpiPens are easily accessible and puffers are not. Just comparing it to EpiPens and peanut butter, it's easy to see there are regulations already in place for these concerns. Why not for asthma?

If parents and doctors agree that the child is capable of administering their own medication when it comes to asthma, then why can't they? There should be an option, and it's an option that can save lives. I want you to hear that: It's an option that can save lives.

The only issue that was raised to me was the issue of liability. With Sabrina's Law, there are protections in place for staff who are trying to follow their training and save a life. I need to get some clarification, because I believe this is what subsection 4(3) is for.

If I'm reading the section correctly, it's to make sure there aren't concerns for liability. In the case of an emergency, we want to know that our trained staff can act to save a life and not worry about liability. If that's what the section is for, then this isn't a problem. But if it isn't what it's referring to, then perhaps there should be more discussion to remove that concern.

Ryan's Law could be an example that we can follow. There are a number of other dangers that face our children at school. The thought that a parent would send their child to school and not know if their child is going to come home is unthinkable and should never happen in the province of Ontario. We can pass Ryan's Law and use it as an example for other cases as well. We can address other conditions and medications before tragedies occur, and make our schools as safe as possible.

In closing, I think I've made it clear that I support the bill. I've highlighted some of the concerns, and I believe they will be dealt with. There's no reason to hold this bill up any longer, when children's safety depends on it. We shouldn't need to wait for a tragedy before we act. We can pass Ryan's Law and use it as an example of how to keep our schools safe in the future, and act before a tragedy occurs.

I'd just like to finish by saying that today is a perfect example of how Queen's Park should work, because with probably passing both of these bills—protecting child performers and Ryan's Law—there is nothing, I want to say as clearly as I can, more important to all of us than our kids and our grandkids. I believe we've all got an obligation to make sure we do everything we can to make sure they come home from school when they finish their classes. Thank you very much for giving me a few minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's absolutely my pleasure today to be able to weigh in on this debate. Indeed, I asked to be able to speak to Ryan's Law.

I would really like to add my own thanks to the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, not only for his advocacy on behalf of students living with asthma in Ontario, but also his advocacy on behalf of Ryan Gibbons's family, who are here with us today.

I also want to give a shout-out to all MPPs across the House who have supported this bill, both through second reading and here at third reading. I also wanted to commend all our lung health partners, who have been with us, side by side, to make sure we get this bill into third reading.

I am very aware of concerns about student asthma and the tragic circumstances surrounding the death and life of Ryan Gibbons. The Gibbons's story could be my family's story and that's why I'm here today. It's also why I so strongly support this bill, not only as a mother, but also as a nurse.

I spent the first 10 years of my career as a nurse at the Hospital for Sick Children, caring for many young patients under age four suffering from asthma. I spent many anxious moments holding my small, struggling patients as they struggled to breathe in their life-saving inhaled medications until they could get relief.

It's interesting: At the Hospital for Sick Children, before we had an Ontario asthma protocol that was standard across this province, we used to do two forms of census every day in the ward where I worked. We would do the

patient census every midnight and we would also do the asthma census every day at midnight. We knew that in spring and fall and on smog-related or high-smog days, we would have an influx of small asthma patients. It's through the work of organizations such as the Asthma Society and all of our health care partners that we finally got control of this and instituted an across-the-board gold standard of care for asthma across the province. And what happened? We had better asthma care across the province and fewer admissions.

We have, in Ontario, done a good job in addressing common asthma triggers: smoking in public places. At the old Hospital for Sick Children, we used to have smoking rooms on every ward where parents could go and have their cigarettes and then go back to the ward, and we could smell the cigarette smoke, which was a trigger for asthma. It's beyond imaginable in today's society that that could happen. So we've done a good job, as a government, to ban smoking in public places; banning smoking in cars that are carrying kids. We've helped to clean up our air, including closing all the coal-fired energy plants that contributed so strongly to smog days or an increase in smog days. In cleaner air, we have certainly reduced some of those triggers. As I said, on smog days, we knew we'd have an influx of patients.

But where we haven't done such a good job is ensuring that our children at school can have their life-saving medication right alongside them. I support this bill as a mother who raised a child with severe lung issues that also included asthma. I breathed along with my child while he was in crisis, almost nose to nose, holding the mask just off of his face because of the panic in his eyes, until he could finally breathe well enough to get in enough breath that his asthma medications would relieve his symptoms and we could live for another day. My son Rory lived in hospitals for about six years out of his first 16 years, struggling to breathe through much of that time. His asthma medication was life-saving and he could not be without it.

To imagine the sheer panic of being unable to draw enough breath to be able to breathe in your asthma medication is very difficult, and as a bystander, we always want to help. My son went back to school only because we had worked with the school board and with his physicians to make sure that he had his medication with him at all times.

Children, even at a very young age, know when they need their medication. Children, no matter where they are, including school, should have immediate access to their medication.

Our government will develop an overarching policy and program memorandum on the management of prevalent medical conditions which support and complement Sabrina's Law, Ryan's Law—once it receives royal assent—and similar legislation, as our government's top priority is the health, safety and well-being of our Ontario students.

Sandra Gibbons, your son, Ryan, was a very special son. In his memory, his life will serve as a beacon of

hope to other families in Ontario who have stood with you to pass this very important bill. As the Ontario Lung Association's mandate says, "When you can't breathe, nothing else matters."

I fully support the passage of this bill.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is my privilege to add my voice to this very important debate for Bill 20, recognizing Ryan's Law. I would like to recognize the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London for his advocacy and his championing this issue on behalf of Ryan Gibbons. I would welcome his family here today and welcome his mother, Sandra. I can only imagine the journey you've had from that day in October 2012 to today. I hope, as we've heard, you'll be able to join us tomorrow as we vote this into law.

As you know, my background is in public education, and I'm coming directly from the classroom into this fine Legislature. I'm pleased to have been a part of various debates in the House, whether it's about bus safety or to have been here earlier this afternoon as we discussed the workplace for children, protecting their safety, their financial futures, considering the environment that they might find themselves in on set and addressing those risks and realities. I look forward to supporting Bill 17 tomorrow, which protects child performers. When we think about a child in their environment—in that case, it's a work environment, but I know all too well the learning environment and the living environment during the day for many of our children in Ontario.

I'll tell you a little bit about safety in schools from a first-hand perspective. Anything can happen at school, anything can happen on a playground, anything can happen in life, and we know that, but we do our best to keep kids safe. We know that accidents can happen, but we know what is unsafe, and we do our best to protect against it. As teachers, we encourage the kids to run and play and get their exercise, but we don't let them run and play on the ice, we don't let them climb and sit on fences, and we don't let them run in the hallways. We know when children are in danger, and we do our best to prevent accidents from happening.

As a classroom teacher for eight years in Durham, I did my best to ensure that every student in my classroom had what they needed to be successful.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: And you did a good job.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Well, and the minister knows first-hand because I taught two of her children in grade 8. And so because of that—thank you for the shout-out—I will not take this opportunity to slam the funding, or rather the underfunding. Much of what I provided for the children in terms of their success may have come from my own pockets, but that's another debate for another time.

I know that students need more than pencils and supplies and books to be successful; they need to feel safe. We address bullying all the time to foster communities that are safe and as open as possible. The realities, when it comes to the learning environment—a productive, effective, strong learning environment—there are so many pieces that need to come together. If children are hungry, they can't concentrate. If children feel unsafe, they can't concentrate. If children are embarrassed, they can't concentrate. If children are excited about gym class, they can't concentrate. We aren't hoping to control day-dreaming, but we do want to strengthen what we can.

Children need to feel safe in the classroom, they need to feel safe in the halls, and they need to feel safe on the yard. If they're running around the yard at recess, they need their airways open. If something should happen that challenges a child's breathing, time is of the essence. I think that every child, parent and teacher would breathe easier knowing that any children with asthma are allowed to carry their own inhaler.

Speaker, we are here today talking about Ryan's Law, a bill ensuring asthma-friendly schools and that students with asthma who have prescribed asthma medication should be able to have that medication at their fingertips and on their person as needed. This bill mandates that every school allow children with asthma to carry that medication with them and that each school in the board have a consistent policy outlining strategies and training requirements.

Wow, 10 minutes goes fast.

I would like to speak a little bit about that training. As my colleague mentioned about Sabrina's Law, which was a law passed—I'll tell you from a teacher's standpoint. What it did for me is that it meant every year I had to have up-to-date training when it came to EpiPens and recognizing anaphylaxis, and to know what to do and where to go. Fortunately, I was never in a situation where I had to reach for an EpiPen or administer, but I feel like it would have been instinct because of the training, because of the parents who came to help us with the training and brought in every new technology, so we knew how to administer the shiny new EpiPen—there was a new shape. We were up to date, and our students are that much safer.

It was something in the staff rooms and the office. We knew what to do, we knew who our students were in a school with various allergies—environmental allergies, food allergies or medical conditions. We could recognize them on the yard. We saw their faces in our staff rooms; that was part of our training. We could recognize them on the yard, and if they were in crisis we could address it appropriately and in a timely fashion.

The thing is, when we look at current board policies, it might be a patchwork and it might be effective, but it needs to be consistent, because in an emergency situation, it's often desperate and it is immediate. You may not know where to go, to run, to look, but if a child has their medication on their person or has their puffer there

with them, that would make all the difference in the world in a life-threatening, immediate situation.

I will say to Sandra Gibbons that I didn't know Ryan, of course, but Ryan was 12, and that was grade 7. I taught intermediate on purpose, by the way. I love teaching intermediate. I love teaching grades 7 and 8. What I know about grade 7s and 8s is that they are active and dynamic. They don't stop. I'll tell you, from a teacher's standpoint, they sure as heck don't play next to the office. They don't play beside a teacher on the yard. They play off in some far corner where you can't get at them and you don't know what they're saying or doing. So anyone in crisis would be awfully far away. In those moments, the child, the student, needs to have their medication with them.

I would also like to say, again, thank you for your advocacy. While we've heard that I'm sure that Ryan is very proud of you and might be impressed with this place, he's probably also very embarrassed, because I know that all grade 7s and 8s would do anything to avoid embarrassment at all cost. He's probably mortified that we're all talking about him, but at the same time he would be so pleased and proud of the work that you and my colleague from Elgin-Middlesex-London have done to move this forward to ensure that no one else would be in that kind of danger or risk in that situation. So thank you very much for that, and congratulations to the member for bringing forward such an important bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon in support of Bill 20. I want to commend the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London, because you're pretty persistent and not just, as they would say, a pretty face. You've been persistent since the time you arrived here at Queen's Park and kept bringing, every year, this private member's bill and improving and protecting the health of every student here in Ontario. I supported it from day one, when you brought the bill back in 2011, 2012 and now 2015.

I also want to acknowledge Ryan's mother for being here. Thank you for your advocacy work, but more importantly, your determination to make sure that the tragedy in your home—that you're bringing that light to this. Because we know that every day there is a child in our schools, our classrooms or on our playgrounds, like my colleague opposite said, who has this medical condition.

As a former public health nurse who spent much of her early career working with cystic fibrosis, I can tell you it's the worst thing to do as a nurse, but also as someone from outside, watching a child looking for air. This is absolutely important for us to have this kind of legislation. But I'm also very public about my concern about the fact that we have a school board not able to have a piece of legislation like this, because as a former chair of the health committee with the Toronto District School Board, I know I could have gotten this kind of bill passed. I know, back in 2010—I'm just looking at my

own bill that I brought at the Toronto District School Board. We at the Toronto District School Board were the first school board in this province to have a type 1 diabetes management policy and training to support the teachers and support every student with type 1 diabetes.

So I want to say thank you to the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for bringing this forward to the Legislature, but also to say that the government of Ontario, through the minister, is making a commitment to make sure that we have a comprehensive policy and program—a memorandum—to deal with prevalent medical conditions, whether it's asthma, type 1 diabetes, epilepsy or other prevalent health conditions, because at the end of the day, another member will be coming to this Legislature to ask for another piece of legislation. We know that we have a really good health care system in Ontario, and every day the quality of life of the students depends on this Legislature to make sure that we keep our schools and our classrooms safe.

1740

The other piece here, I want to remind each member of the House, is that although the bill talks about the whole issue of the classroom, the principal's requirements, the piece about employees—the member from Niagara Falls talked about this—the most challenging piece of this bill is the implementation; it's not passing this tomorrow in third reading and getting royal assent. What is most challenging is making sure that Bill 20 will be implemented in September 2015; making sure every teacher, every employee and every staff member, along with the parents who come to disclose to the school that their child has asthma—because at the end of the day, I know that in my community, a diverse community, the parents may be reluctant to come forward with that information.

I'm very pleased to join the debate, and I thank the member opposite for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: I salute my colleague from the opposite way there. Doctors always support pharmacists. As you know, it's a team effort in the delivery of health care.

Of course, we recognize and honour the memory of Ryan and salute his family for coming forward and not only sharing their grief but, let's say, repurposing their experience for the benefit of all Ontarians' children.

Asthma, as you may know, Speaker, is a Greek word that means "difficulty breathing." If I might speak as a doctor for a moment, I think that it's really a tragedy on many different levels—not only that people should actually lose their life due to asthma, but even suffer from their daily activities. Because we, as doctors, and my colleague opposite, as a pharmacist, and the nurses who have spoken know that if you have the right puffers at the right time, with the right dosage, you really should be able to conduct your life as you like it, with full activity.

I'll just review for a moment. There are basically two processes that happen in asthma. The first is that the

airways or the windpipe tightens up. That's what leads to the flute music. As some of my patients say, "Oh, Doctor, that's the gypsy music coming from my lungs." The other process is what we call inflammation, or friendly fire, where the lungs kind of go to war with themselves. Of course, there are particular puffers that are for both of these.

The emergency puffers, Speaker, as you may know, are the ones that open the airway instantaneously. It's the famous blue puffer, salbutamol, or Ventolin, as it's known. That has to not only be available in a timely fashion—and, yes, I agree with my colleagues opposite: It should likely be carried on the person of the individual because time is of the essence in this matter, of course.

I want to just say—whether it's Ontarians listening to me, or my colleagues, or individuals who have asthma—that medical progress and the devices and the medications are available to the point where if you're using this stuff on a regular basis properly, you really should be able to avoid, for the most part, any and all asthma attacks. What I mean by that: For example, there are certain puffers where, within a single device, a single inhaler, a single puffer, are embedded two or three medications that do it all at once. For example, they will open the airway quick, they will open the airway long—meaning for eight to 10 hours—and they will also dry the inflammation or the crud or the phlegm or the inflammatory fluid that's in there.

As I say, whatever the triggers are, whether it's the friendly family cat or industrial asthma—for example, we know there's a whole category called occupational asthma—whether it's allergy-driven or whether it's, as we call it, aero-allergy-driven—for example, during the summertime, with trees, pollens, grasses and so on—all of these things can be anticipated, and hopefully, with a judicious and intelligent review with the family physician and the family and perhaps, of course, the larger circle of care, which no doubt would involve the principal and the school system, all of these things can be avoided.

For example, there is a type of asthma called exercise-induced asthma. We know that kids are basically fine, but if they challenge themselves—I guess it's like a stress test—which could be playing hockey, running upstairs or playing any of the various sports—we know that if they pre-treat themselves—for example, let's say 15 to 20 to 30 minutes before they actually go through that stress—they kind of cover that activity.

All of these things are the types of conversations that we as family doctors have, not only with patients individually, but with families; and, of course, those of us who are responsible for teaching and publicizing that information on a broader basis, not only to the public but also to fellow physicians.

We certainly salute this bill. As I say, doctors are obligated to support pharmacists in all of their various initiatives, so I do that, as is the protocol, but I think it's very worthy.

Once again, a salute to the Gibbons family.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Yurek has moved third reading of Bill 20, An Act to protect pupils with asthma. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, pursuant to the order of the House earlier today, this vote is deferred until deferred votes tomorrow, April 30.

Third reading vote deferred.

2015 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 28, 2015, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): When this bill was last debated, the member from Scarborough–Agincourt had some time left. I turn it over to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Transportation.

This particular budget—I know that we just heard the presentation last Thursday from the Minister of Finance—but there's one aspect of Bill 91 that I wanted to share with the audience here tonight, the piece focusing on investing in people and their skills. The minister and the Premier recognize that the greatest strength in this province is the people, and we need to make sure every individual, especially young people, has the skills and ability to adapt to the very technological society we're living in, to deal with the competitive nature of business out there.

The other piece here is that if we invest in young people of all ages and all diversities in Ontario, it will give them the support they need to find the right jobs. The 2015 budget shows that Ontario will continue to improve in both education and skills training, from preschool to post-secondary.

One of the programs that I wanted to spend some time on is the renewal of Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy. Moving forward in 2015, the proposed budget would focus on adding an additional \$250 million over two years, bringing the total to \$565 million, in terms of youth employment programs. Again, we as a government are very concerned about youth unemployment, and we need to provide adequate support. When we provide this kind of support, in terms of skills development and training in the community, young people will have more opportunity.

The other piece that the government of Ontario is proposing is the Experience Ontario initiative. This is a new pilot program that will support recently graduated high school students. I think this program, Experience Ontario, is similar to one in Europe called gap years, which allows young people to find their own goals, their

own passions so that they can choose an appropriate post-secondary education pathway. I know that oftentimes, young people, when they graduate from high school, still don't know what career, what education pathway they want to pursue. Through Experience Ontario, young people who recently graduated from high school will have that opportunity.

The other piece here is that I'm very, very pleased that the government is supporting skilled trades through the investment of \$13 million over two years targeting pre-apprenticeship programs. As a former school board trustee, I recognize that this is a piece that will be very well received in every single school board in Ontario because, at the end of the day, it provides early interest and support in local schools, especially in the area of in-classroom support.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to sit, but I wanted to say that this is a bill that's focused a lot on investing in people as well as their skills.

1750

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be followed by the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to our government's budget bill. This budget demonstrates that we are meeting or exceeding our targets to bring the budget into balance by 2017-18, but we're also on track to tackle our infrastructure deficit. That's what I want to speak to: about this budget being about building up Ontario. This government is very much focused on creating those investments over the next decade of \$130 billion, but specifically \$31.5 billion for roads, bridges and transit over that period of time as well.

When we renew and expand public infrastructure in this province, we're helping Ontario's industry and jobs, and we're helping to create opportunities to grow and expand this province and compete in a global economy. When Ontario invests, we're building. These investments, especially within the sphere of roads, bridges and transit, are going to have a tremendous impact on our ability to grow and expand, innovate and have a more productive economy.

We know that gridlock costs this economy about \$11 billion a year. So when some people, perhaps on the other side of the House, criticize us for spending, I want to ask them: Is it wise to not spend and impose these costs on the private sector, imposing \$11 billion a year in costs on the private sector and Ontario residents? I think not. That's why we're investing.

Our investments to expand roads, bridges, rail, the GO Transit system, create investments in various municipalities across this province, in light rail and bus rapid transit projects, are very important to the residents of Ontario, to the businesses of Ontario and our ability to be a competitive economy. Whether it's in Waterloo, Mississauga, Brampton, the city of Toronto, Ottawa or other

communities across this province, these investments are extremely important.

It's also important that we're building resilient infrastructure to help us with climate change. In my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, we have the Manby transformer station. When it was deluged with water back in 2013, the lights went out across much of Toronto and parts of the GTA. That was as a result of a lack of investment in hydro infrastructure. We've now invested in that facility, so the lights will stay on, so business can continue to produce, so residents can enjoy their quality of life, and we're continuing investments across the GTA in hydro and other forms of infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to sit down now because I'm looking forward to hearing what the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry has to say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member and recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much. I want to thank my colleagues who have spoken on the bill today for their input.

I'm going to focus on infrastructure—I just have a few minutes here today before we rise for the evening—but before I do that, I want to highlight a couple of pieces that I'm very proud of in regard to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Our forestry stakeholders are very excited by this particular budget. They are very excited by a few of the particular pieces that we brought forward to support them as we see this industry, I would say, rebounding—not fully recovered; there are still challenges in the forest industry, as we all know. But there are some significant and positive stories occurring on the landscape in Ontario, particularly in the sawmilling industry. The pieces that we brought forward in this year's budget will certainly help them, and it's our belief and hope that it will incent them to make further investments in their industry, in their operations, so that, in fact, we can see more growth coming forward in their sector. Of note, bringing the roads funding program back up to \$60 million: This was huge for them. They're very excited by that commitment.

The NIER Program: My colleague the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and I had an opportunity three or four weeks ago to announce the permanency of this electricity relief program for our large industrials, forestry being one of them. It's \$120 million a year, which will very much go a long way to supporting them and, I believe, will incent them to make further investments in their operations here in Ontario. I'm very proud of that.

One that I take great pride in is that now our Jobs and Prosperity Fund—people will have heard that this was a \$2.5-billion fund over 10 years. This budget increased that fund by \$200 million, taking it up to \$2.7 billion over 10 years. My point: For the first time now, the forestry industry will be eligible under the Jobs and Prosperity Fund.

I look forward to working with my colleague the Minister of Economic Development on the design of the program and the eligibility criteria for the forest industry to apply into that particular program. This is a big piece for forestry, and I'm very proud of that.

There's more I could say on that, but what I do want to talk about, and be a bit of a homer on this one, is the infrastructure piece that we've announced our continued commitment to in Ontario. We've been doing this since 2003, I always like to remind people. Infrastructure was one of the deficits we identified when first elected in 2003, and we have been investing massively since then. This budget further commits us to that over the next number of years.

I want to give you some examples of what it means, though, for my community of Thunder Bay. When we were first elected in 2003—we have a Bombardier plant that has been there for decades. Rosie the Riveter, back in the Second World War days—that was in Thunder Bay. That plant has been there for decades and decades. When we were elected in 2003, they were down to 200 to 250 employees. Bombardier had closed about six plants internationally. Who knows—I don't for sure—but it's possible that that plant was in danger of closure.

In 1995, when the official opposition had been elected, their leader of the day made a very strong public commitment where he said, "We're not in the mass transit game. It's not our responsibility." That's fine. That was a policy position that they took. That—in part, for sure—was responsible for the population of employment in the Bombardier plant being as low as 200 to 250.

When we were elected in 2003, our platform document in that year spoke very clearly to the fact that we were now back into the mass transit game, and we have been ever since 2003. Here's the point, Speaker: From 200 to 250 employees in 2003, that particular plant today is employing somewhere in the neighbourhood of 1,400 people.

Applause.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Thank you.

This is a massive job creator on the scale of our community. Thunder Bay proper is about 110,000 people; the surrounding communities, five smaller municipalities in my riding—one, just to the east of Thunder Bay, is called Shuniah—and another group of six smaller organized municipalities bring us up to about 120,000 or 125,000 people. When we can add 1,200 jobs into the employment pool in our particular neck of the woods, this has a dramatic impact on a variety of levels in a city of our size. It's a piece that I take great pride in, and it is a piece that I feel we need to continually underscore.

Sitting just to the right of me here is the Minister of Transportation. In this particular budget, we have made further commitments on mass transit and infrastructure generally. When we talk about infrastructure, people tend to think roads and bridges, hospitals and schools—all relevant; we've made massive commitments in those areas. But the Minister of Transportation just to my right

knows that within the \$31.5-billion MoveOntario piece over the next 10 years—about \$16 billion to \$16.5 billion in the GTA and about \$15 billion to \$15.5 billion outside the GTA—some of or much of the expenditure in that particular program will be focused on more mass transit infrastructure for downtown Toronto: light rail, rolling stock, subways, GO Transit—all of those products being produced, as we speak, out of the Bombardier plant in Thunder Bay.

While I can't stand here today and the minister responsible can't stand here today and say for sure that this commitment will lead directly to more employment in our plant—obviously, there are still competitive forces at play. But given the history of that plant, given what's going on there right now, I think it's fair for us to say that there is a real opportunity, with 1,400 people already employed in that particular plant. As a result of this further infrastructure commitment from our government, con-

firmed in this budget, we will at least see sustained levels of 1,400 people being employed at the plant, with the opportunity for further growth.

In addition to everything else that's happened in Thunder Bay, having one of the lowest unemployment rates in the province of Ontario for the last four, five and six years, this piece here today—infrastructure generally, mass transit more specifically—has a tremendous opportunity to further enhance the funding in that particular plant, with greater benefits for the city of Thunder Bay and the surrounding area.

Speaker, I see you're giving me the eye. My time is up. I want to thank you for this opportunity.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Seeing as it is now 6 o'clock, this assembly is adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
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Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
Laurie Scott, Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short



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Thursday 30 April 2015

Jeudi 30 avril 2015



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 30 April 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 30 avril 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE MOIS DU PATRIMOINE HISPANIQUE

Mrs. Martins moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 28, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Hispanic Heritage Month/ Projet de loi 28, Loi proclamant le mois d'octobre Mois du patrimoine hispanique.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mrs. Martins.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today for the third reading debate of Bill 28, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Hispanic Heritage Month.

As many of you know, this is something I have been working on for some time now. I'd like to thank everyone who helped to make this day a reality, and a special thank you to my staff, Michael Paolucci and Celso Pereira, who are joining us here today in the House, as well as Matt Iannucci. I'd like to thank all the House leaders for seeing the importance of this bill and for pushing it through to third reading.

Before I start, I'd like to point out that we have a number of members of the Hispanic community who will be joining us here for this important day. These are prominent individuals who publish newspapers, run cultural centres, and work in banks and posts in public service, all of whom contribute to shaping the lives of countless Ontarians.

I'm happy to say that we also have with us those who have signed petitions calling on this Legislature to pass Bill 28. I want to reserve special thanks for members of the community whom I have been consulting with at every stage of this bill: Fernando Valladares, Oscar Vigil, Claudio Ruiz and Claudia Montoya. I'm happy that they're all here, bright and early, listening to this historic debate in the Ontario Legislature.

Unfortunately, not in attendance today is Margarita Feliciano, professor emerita at Glendon College's Hispanic Studies department. Professor Feliciano does tremendous work within the Hispanic community and organizes the annual Festival of Images and Words.

Simply put, this bill provides our province with an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the Hispanic-Canadian community here in Ontario. Our province must pay tribute to the culture that binds Spanish speakers together, and this bill does just that.

The strong influence that peoples of Hispanic origin have had on our world is evident. As I mentioned in our second reading debate, individuals like Frida Kahlo, Salvador Dalí and Gabriel García Márquez possess a unique influence over art and culture in our world. The rich contributions of these giants of the Hispanic community are well known. However, we must recognize the outstanding achievements and lasting influence of the Hispanic community right here in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to discuss the history of this fantastic community in this great province of ours. As pointed out in the preamble of this bill, the Hispanic community in Canada was established by a few thousand Spanish migrants in 1914. The first significant surge in immigration came during the 1970s, which was a time of great socio-economic and political turbulence across Spanish-speaking countries. In the 1980s, armed conflict prompted a further influx of immigrants. Most recently, since the 1990s, immigration from the Spanish-speaking world has been characterized as a "professional wave" of individuals travelling to Canada to study or work.

For those who came during the early waves of immigration, life in Canada was often challenging. These early immigrants experienced unemployment and, in many cases, racism and discrimination.

Despite immigrating from a number of nations, each with its own distinct culture, Spanish speakers developed a shared community and gathered in certain hubs around the country, such as in Toronto's Kensington Market.

The Hispanic community has recently grown significantly in size and has now become one of the most prominent communities in the country. There are approximately half a million Canadians of Hispanic origin, but this number is substantially higher when we include non-citizens and permanent residents. Not only this, but the Hispanic community is also one of the fastest-growing populations in the entire country.

I used these numbers in our second reading debate, but I think they're quite powerful: Between 1996 and 2001, the number of Hispanic peoples in Canada increased by 32%, while the overall population grew by only 4% during the same period. Spanish is Canada's most spoken language after English and French, and has been the fastest-growing foreign language spoken by Canadians since 2001. Almost 50% of Hispanic Canadians have at

least a bachelor's degree and another 12% have a non-university diploma. Also, the Toronto Hispanic Chamber of Commerce approximates that the economic impact of Latin-American businesses on the Toronto-area economy is between \$49.2 million and \$73.8 million.

It's hard to argue with the fact that the influence of this population on our province is immense. In my riding of Davenport alone there are approximately 10,000 citizens of Hispanic origin. The Hispanic community continues to make such a tremendous impact on my riding. By just walking through Davenport on any day, anyone can see these contributions are very tangible. It's hard to dismiss the beautiful Lula Lounge on Dundas West, which has established itself as the premier venue in this city for Latin music and dancing. Club Amistad, located at the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre, is a wonderful social and recreational group for Spanish-speaking men and women from various Latin cultures. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Villa Las Flores, the non-profit housing complex located off St. Helen's. The founder of this charitable organization is the very strong community leader Fernando Valladares. Every September, there is also the wonderful Viva Mexico festival, hosted at Earls Court Park.

The immense contributions of Hispanic Canadians are clearly not just felt in Davenport, or even just in the GTA. I have to say that during our second reading debate, I really enjoyed the very eloquent remarks from other members about the impact of the Hispanic community within their own lives and in their ridings.

One that immediately comes to mind are the very emphatic remarks from the member opposite from Timiskaming-Cochrane, on his constituent Martin Melendez, who brought his expertise of cheese-making from El Salvador to our province. The minister responsible for seniors spoke about the vibrant Spanish-speaking community he has in his riding of York West; of course, to showcase the Plaza Latina on Milvan Drive. And the member from York South-Weston, who will be joining this debate shortly, spoke about the great organizations in her riding, such as the York Hispanic Centre.

Mr. Speaker, it is no coincidence that all of us here in the Legislature can speak so highly of the valuable contributions that Canadians of Hispanic origin make within all of our communities.

0910

Last time I rose in the Legislature I told the story of Alberto Guerrero, an individual who embodies these rich contributions of the Hispanic community in our province. Alberto Guerrero was a leading figure in the vibrant Chilean music scene. Moving to Toronto in 1918, Guerrero single-handedly brought the music of modern, 20th-century composers to Canada. In time, he became the most important music teacher in the country. Mr. Speaker, he mentored young Canadian pianists, including Glenn Gould, arguably Canada's most celebrated classical pianist. I believe that this is such a fantastic story that embodies the real, tangible influence of the Hispanic community on our province.

Today, I'd like to speak on a more local level about a constituent of mine who I think embodies these characteristics. Severino Centritto, who lives in the beautiful Regal Heights neighbourhood in my riding of Davenport, I think deserves a lot of praise for his community service. Mr. Centritto originates from Argentina, and for 15 years he has been working to make our community the best it can be. He was a member of the Regal Heights Residents' Association and has provided great assistance for the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre. He was also a member of the Toronto Seniors' Forum to serve as a voice for senior residents in our community.

I first met Mr. Centritto at the Regal Heights Residents' Association community cleanup, and I'm happy to say that he and his wife, Hilda, are watching today, this momentous day. I'd like to give him a round of applause for all his hard work. Gracias, Severino.

Applause.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It is precisely these individuals who make it important to declare October Hispanic Heritage Month. The celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month will allow us as a province to recognize the rich contributions Hispanic Canadians have made to the province's social, economic, political and multicultural fabric.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important bill. In 2015, it can be easy to accept our province's multiculturalism as a foregone conclusion. If you think back even 20 or 30 years, it's impressive to see how far we've come. But there is still more work to be done. We have to recognize that in Toronto, a city of nearly three million people with a substantial Hispanic population, councillor Cesar Palacio is the only elected official of Hispanic origin at any level of government. Not one of us here in the chamber comes from a Spanish-speaking background. That makes it so much more important that we proclaim October as Hispanic Heritage Month.

If this bill passes today, I encourage all members of this House to reach out to the Spanish-speaking community within their ridings, in preparation for the celebrations of Hispanic Heritage Month. With the Pan/Parapan American games coming to Ontario in just a few months, an occasion in which we will be welcoming so many delegations from Spanish-speaking countries, I can't think of a better time to do this.

I want to thank everyone for giving me this opportunity to speak, and I hope that you all join me in supporting this bill today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: Buenos días.

I want to first of all thank the member for Davenport for her motion. This is a very historic day. For those who were following the debate yesterday, we had exceptional debate for Mr. Miller's child actors bill, Bill 17. And I know Mr. Yurek is in the media studio with some of his constituents, celebrating the debate that took place yesterday for Ryan's Law.

I'm pleased to speak, as House leader for the official opposition, in support of Bill 28. I happen to believe that

motions and bills like this, celebrating our cultural heritage, are very important in helping communities within our ridings be recognized and give them a chance to celebrate their heritage, but also it gives us an opportunity to shed light and raise awareness on the history and achievements that the Hispanic community have in all of our ridings. This is going to be a great chance for us to celebrate the over 400,000 Canadians of Hispanic heritage and origin throughout our province.

As you know, Speaker, Spanish is a very important international language and is increasingly important to speak and understand to function in our globalized world. Throughout my riding, I have a number of young students participating in Spanish clubs at our elementary schools, gaining a really important introduction into the language and into the Hispanic culture which I hope will carry them for many years to come.

I also want to recognize a couple of schools in my riding: first, Thousand Islands Secondary School, where Spanish is offered as part of their international studies program. They have a number of students who travel on an annual basis to Nicaragua for a comparative study trip in which they experience cultural immersion by living at a Nicaraguan family member's home. At Saint Mary Catholic High School they have an annual trip to Mexico, where the students gain knowledge about a specific issue that faces the area they visit. It helps create understanding for that part of the Hispanic community.

Let's face it, Speaker: In my riding, I only represent probably a couple of hundred constituents of Hispanic heritage, but no matter whether it's a couple of hundred or a couple of hundred thousand, I think it's very important that all three parties support this bill. I want to thank the member from Davenport for fostering this bill and fostering this debate today.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention an event that starts tomorrow in my riding of Leeds–Grenville. It's the 34th Annual Multicultural Community Festival. It happens every May. I was there when the festival began, when I was mayor of Brockville back in the early-1980s. I have to tell you that it's just a wonderful event in my riding that brings together and highlights our diversity and all the cultures that make Leeds and Grenville such a wonderful place to live in. This year, representing the Hispanic community, there will be performances by a Spanish folk dance troupe, a Venezuelan performance group and Mi Peru. There will be booths from Costa Rica, Peru and the Caribbean. In the past, we've had booths from constituents who find their origins from Mexico, Colombia and Argentina. It's a joy to watch those performances. I am going to be there on Friday night to help open the Multicultural Community Festival.

I want to close by saying to the member for Davenport: This is an exciting day for you. I've had private member's bills that go through this process. It's great to see that all three parties have agreed and have moved this forward. I want close by saying to the member for Davenport: *Nos vemos en octubre*.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's always an honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of the people we represent in our various ridings. But it's a pleasure to participate in a debate on a legislative initiative that has such broad support from all members of the House; really meaningful support and authentic support, because I think that all of us have Hispanic constituents, and all of us recognize the importance of celebrating the contributions and accomplishments of the Hispanic community to Ontario's success.

I want commend the efforts of the member from Davenport in bringing this bill forward, the consultation she has conducted on the bill, the input she has gotten and the support she has generated around declaring October as Hispanic Heritage Month. This is a proud moment for me, as the member for London West, because a large number of my constituents are Hispanic—in particular, from Colombia.

As a nation, Canada is really built on the value of not just acknowledging but celebrating our rich cultural diversity and the heritage, traditions and values that newcomers—immigrants—brought to this country and made as Canadians. The bill before us today recognizes in particular the contributions of Hispanic Canadians to our social, economic, political and cultural fabric, and speaks to those core fundamental values that really define us as Canadians.

As stated in the preamble to the bill, Ontario is home to more than 400,000 first-, second- and third-generation Canadians of Hispanic origin. We know that as early as 1914, Canadians who originated from the 23 Hispanic countries began the wave of immigration to this province, and today the Hispanic community is one of the fastest-growing immigrant populations in Ontario.

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"Hispanic origin" means an immigrant from any Spanish-speaking country, so it can encompass a broad range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These countries include Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and, of course, Spain.

When you look at all of those diverse countries, you see the kind of richness of the Hispanic cultural heritage that Ontario benefits from when Hispanic Canadians come to our province. In fact, some broader definitions of "Hispanic" would also include former colonies that are Spanish-speaking but not ethnically Spanish, such as the Philippines, which makes that diversity even richer and broader.

As I mentioned, my community of London, and actually London West specifically, is home to many Hispanic immigrants. That makes the profile of immigration in London quite unique compared to the rest of the province. In Ontario overall, Latin American immigrants make up about 5% of all newcomers, but in London, 17% of our immigrants are from Latin America. Also, as I mentioned earlier, they are from Colombia in particular.

For more than a decade, London has been the go-to spot for many Colombian refugee claimants. In fact, this has earned the city of London the nickname of "Londombia" because of the number of Colombian immigrants or Colombian refugees who have settled in our city. This gives Londoners access to experience the richness, the wonderful food, the music, art and culture in our community. You can frequently hear Spanish being spoken on the streets of our city.

The current influx of Colombians to London began in the late 1990s. In 1997, there were just 16 Colombians who came to our community. The following year, 1998, there were 43 Colombians who came, and the following year, there were 126. As Colombians came, they felt welcomed in our community. The word spread back home and we saw more and more Colombians coming to London. In 2000, there were 395, and the numbers have continued to grow. More recently, we have also seen refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala who have begun to join Colombians in seeking refugee status and settling in our city.

Colombia remains number three, actually, on Canada's list of the top 10 source countries for refugees to London. Today, the numbers vary, but there are approximately 15,000 Colombians who are currently living in the city. As I mentioned, their presence has helped to diversify the local economy. We've seen many Spanish businesses, grocery stores, Latin American-style restaurants and a Spanish church being established all across the city.

Among all of the immigrants who currently live in London, Colombians make up the third-largest immigrant community. Again, this is quite different from the profile of immigrants both in Ontario and in Canada. Colombia does not even appear among the top 10 countries of origin for immigrant communities when you look at the census data from Ontario and Canada.

The other notable aspect of Colombian immigrants is that they are overwhelmingly the largest number of recent newcomers to the city. London welcomed about 2,000 Colombians in total between 2006 and 2011, which was almost three times as many as the next-largest number of immigrants, which was from the Chinese community, to our city.

Not only is Spanish the most common non-official language spoken in London, but it has also overtaken French as the second-most frequent mother tongue after English. So you can see that our city has really changed because of the influx of Hispanic immigrants.

We see this in our schools and we see this in our workplaces. We see this in the businesses that are being established and launched across our community, and in the services that are being developed to meet the needs of the growing Hispanic community in London. We had our first Spanish-language phone book created in 2007. This was obviously needed because of our exploding Latin community.

I just want to take a moment to recognize some of the individuals who have contributed so much to London's

prosperity and cultural landscape through the Hispanic traditions that they have shared with our community.

I want to recognize George Perez, from Mexico. He is publisher of *La Jornada*, which is London's bilingual Spanish newspaper. It has a circulation of more than 35,000 across the area, and it provides content that is tailored to the cultural needs of Hispanics. Some articles are in Spanish; some are in English. There is a page that provides content that is translated in both languages.

Jose Rey is publisher of *Latino*, a second Spanish media. He has been creating and distributing Spanish-language media through this bi-monthly newspaper, *Latino!* He has also created *Latino!TV*. It's a weekly television program on Rogers cable.

In addition, he has established an annual recognition evening to salute Spanish-speaking people in our community across 10 categories, because the achievements of the Hispanic community in London are significant and also broad. He recognizes achievement in business, sports, community work and arts and culture.

I also want to recognize Felipe Gomes, who is the owner of *Aroma* restaurant, which was established in 2001 in London and has been delighting Londoners and tourists to our city for many years with their Mediterranean specialty dishes.

Finally, there is the incomparable Alfredo Caxaj, who is the founder and artistic director of *Sunfest*, the second-largest music festival in Canada and a showcase of the world's best musicians. Last year, Alfredo was named one of the 10 most influential Hispanic Canadians by the Canadian Hispanic Business Alliance.

Sunfest has been around in London since 1995, and it has grown to become one of London's largest attractions. It has become deeply embedded in London's cultural and civic identity and enjoys ongoing support from a range of corporate and government sponsors. It is a world music festival, but Alfredo, who comes from Guatemala, has always made an effort to ensure that there is good representation from Hispanic musicians and performers.

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With this wave of immigration, there is also clearly a strong economic impact from the growing Spanish-speaking demographic in our community. In 2009, the London Chamber of Commerce launched the Hispanic Business Opportunities Task Force, the first of its kind, to help grow London's economy by determining how best to meet the needs of the Hispanic business community.

The purpose of the task force is to identify the tools and skills needed by Hispanic business owners to make a positive, sustainable contribution to the local economy, and to assist in learning how to integrate Hispanic businesses with the larger business population in London. More recently, the task force has turned its focus to developing new business relationships in Latin America.

As the member for Davenport mentioned, the Hispanic community is highly educated. They bring incredible professional qualifications and skills that can certainly be leveraged to support our economic well-being both in London and in the province.

Before I move to the bill, Speaker, I also did want to acknowledge the contributions of Hispanic Canadians to the labour movement and standing up for workers' rights. Many Hispanic Canadians arrived in Canada after fleeing countries like Mexico, or in South America, where they were arrested or tortured for exercising their rights to unionize.

The Hispanic community has also made a tremendous contribution in my riding through organizations such as LACASA, which stands for the Latin American-Canadian Solidarity Association, which works specifically on issues of social justice. They have done a lot of work in solidarity with indigenous people to raise awareness of the challenges—the threats—facing indigenous people worldwide and in Canada. They have organized for peace, and they have spoken out strongly on poverty and climate justice.

As I said, our caucus is very much in support of this legislation. Bill 28 designates October as Hispanic Heritage Month because of the significance of the month for the Hispanic community worldwide.

We know—everyone knows—from our days in elementary school that Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas on October 12, 1492, so October has significance from that historical fact alone. But as shown by the bill's references to indigenous resistance and cultural diversity, a number of holidays have been established that celebrate the arrival of Columbus to the Americas, but also offer an opportunity to reflect on the devastating impact of this arrival on the indigenous people who were already here in this country.

In appreciation to many of the Hispanic communities who have organized events in October, they have shifted from focusing on the celebration of conquest to celebrating cultural diversity. And so, each year around the world during the month of October, we see a number of significant celebrations, such as Hispanic Day, Day of the Cultures, Day of the Race, Day of Respect for Cultural Diversity, Day of Indigenous Resistance, and the commemoration of Hispanic Heritage Month in North America.

In closing, I want to say that we're very appreciative of the efforts of the member for Davenport to bring this bill forward. We're appreciative of the opportunity to speak in support of the bill on behalf of people in our ridings who are of Hispanic ethnocultural heritage, but also in recognition of the number of Hispanics across this province and the contributions that they have made to our province and to enriching Ontario's cultural environment.

This bill is important. I really like the part of the bill that talks about not just celebrating Hispanic culture but also allowing us and future generations of Ontarians to learn more about Hispanic history, Hispanic culture and the accomplishments and contributions of Hispanic Canadians to Ontario's economic and social well-being.

So October as Hispanic Heritage Month, which I hope we could be celebrating as early as October 2015—I am sure it will be a wonderful, fantastic opportunity to recognize the achievements of the Hispanic population that,

one hopes, will just continue to grow and to enrich Ontario and make us, as a community, stronger.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Buenos días. Good morning. I am very pleased to join the debate this morning here in support of the MPP from Davenport and her bill. It's great to be here to work together to ensure that October will be the month that will recognize the Hispanic community in Ontario, whose ancestors, as we heard, came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America and South America.

Canada's Hispanic community has grown from a tiny group of pioneering Spanish and Latin American immigrants to a very vibrant community. Ontario is the province that has the largest amount of Hispanic descendants. In the riding of York South—Weston, which I have the privilege to represent, I am very honoured to have a very passionate community of residents, businesses, small businesses, restaurants, cafés and local organizations. A number of community organizations in our riding, such as, for example, the York Hispanic Centre, which the member from Davenport mentioned, the Community Action Resource Centre, the Jane Street Hub and the Learning Enrichment Foundation, all provide services to the Hispanic community that include settlement, for example, for those who are still newcomers, but also translations, educational workshops, student and volunteer placement, and legal aid.

The Hispanic migration contributes to the growth of our province through their continuous contribution toward our economy, and we are very enriched by their culture, their music, their food, the sports, which we all enjoy, and the language. It's so musical and so sophisticated. I always wish that I could be fluent in Spanish. It's one of the languages that I enjoy the most.

The Hispanic contribution in the province of Ontario is clearly visible in various ways. We have many examples of personalities, of people who have really become successful. For example, just in sports, one could mention Raphael Torres, who currently plays for the San Jose Sharks, in the NHL, and a Team Canada hockey player who was born and raised here in Toronto but his dad is Mexican and his mom is from Peru. Then we have Miguel Cañizalez, an El Salvadorian soccer player who was also raised in Toronto and who made several appearances in the Canadian national team.

In the musical field, I think of Carlos del Junco, a Cuban Canadian harmonica musician; and José Miguel Contreras, vocalist of the Toronto-based rock band By Divine Right. But it's also important to remember members of the Hispanic community that have made and continue to make a contribution to our political life.

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One person who was not mentioned is the Honourable Sergio Marchi, former MP for York West, former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and Canadian ambassador. Now, he's contended between two communities because the Italian community will claim that Sergio

Marchi is of Italian descent, and that's where his parents or grandparents were from. But he was born in Argentina and moved to Canada in his early years, so he is of Hispanic background.

Toronto's city councillor for Ward 17 Davenport, Cesar Palacio, who was already mentioned by the member from Davenport, is the first Hispanic person elected to Toronto city council. He was born in Ecuador. He still holds that right of the first person elected—and the only one—at Toronto city council.

Mr. Speaker, proclaiming Hispanic Heritage Month here in our Legislature would provide the opportunity for the Hispanic community to celebrate their unique history and culture, but it would also give us—all Ontarians—the opportunity to recognize their contribution to our province and to our country. As we've heard, October is a significant month for the Hispanic community. That's when people of Hispanic origin around the world come together to celebrate their shared culture.

This is truly a shared culture. This is not a monolithic community. We have heard that they come from different nationalities. Two things unite them: One is their shared language, and the second is the determination to build a better life—a better life for themselves, for their children, for their grandchildren.

So I'm really glad that we have all come together here in agreement to help proclaim October heritage month for the Hispanic community.

Thank you; gracias, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's truly my pleasure to stand today and speak for a few minutes on Bill 28, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Hispanic Heritage Month. I know the member from Davenport has worked very hard on this. I appreciate that and thank her for this. It must be a good day that it is going through the next process of our Legislature and then the final stamp that may come forward.

I'll say "buenos días," and that will be about the extent of my Spanish. I really apologize for that. I've been learning some more words as I've been sitting listening to the debate this morning, and also about the Hispanic culture. I come from a predominately rural riding in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I'm always pleased to be exposed to different cultures, not only as I've travelled but within the city of Toronto I hear much Hispanic culture. Also, the member from London was explaining the extent of the Hispanic culture there. I will definitely, when I go to London, be checking that out and enjoying that.

As has been said in the Legislature, Ontario has been long home to this thriving Hispanic community. Over the years members in the House have supported motions and presented petitions to recognize this vital cultural and economic role that this community plays. As I say, I'm happy to lend my voice to theirs today, supporting this final formalizing of the recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario every October.

Spanish-speaking communities around the world have adopted October as a time to celebrate their heritage. It's about time that Ontario joined in these celebrations too. Originally, when it was brought in, I believe that they were looking at April. October seems to be the month that is more in line with the rest of the world and some of the municipalities, which I'll get to.

When the member from York South-Weston mentioned the many celebrities in arts, culture and sports with Hispanic community names, they start to ring bells and I'm like, "Oh, yes, that's correct. They do have that heritage." Ontario is a diverse province and the Hispanic community is part of that success.

There are 400,000 to 500,000 people of Hispanic origin in the province—that's first-, second- and third-generation—and they've made a great contribution. I did not know until this morning that it's one of the fastest-growing populations in the province.

There was the time when April was brought in, as I said before, but October being more in keeping—I should keep to my notes so I don't get myself mixed up. The bill would enshrine in law the recognition and celebration of the contributions made by Canadians of Hispanic origin, but moving it to October makes sense.

I mentioned municipalities, so I'll say that just last year Toronto city council declared that October would be Hispanic Heritage Month as well. That brings us in line with what the city has declared. I always like it when we're keeping in the same line. Sometimes that doesn't happen all the time in politics and laws.

With the Hispanic population of Toronto among the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the city, representing over 20 Spanish-speaking countries in the world—which, thus, I should have learned Spanish—the city of Toronto has a formal friendship agreement with the city of Quito, Ecuador. Hopefully I'm pronouncing that correctly, but Hansard will get the correct spelling.

Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated throughout the world in October as the "Month of the Race."

October is a month that strongly symbolizes and celebrates the Hispanic heritage by encouraging and promoting all its traditions, cultural influences and enriching ethnicity of all Latin roots through North, Central and South America, and Spain. As all the Hispanic independence festivities conclude by the month of September, the idea of changing it to October will be represented as a closing ceremony for all the Hispanic independence days worldwide.

The concept of Hispanic Heritage Month and moving the celebration from April to October is supported in principle by the Hispanic Development Council, the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples, the Canadian Hispanic Congress, the Toronto District School Board, and a large number of Hispanic community leaders and community organizations.

I'm certainly pleased to support—as I know we've heard all parties are—this bill moving forward this morning. I think it gives an opportunity for all of us to go and enjoy this great Hispanic culture that we have been able

to have both in, mostly, our urban centres, but I'm sure it's rolling out.

In some of the high schools I know the kids are interested in speaking Spanish. It is a great thing as our kids in high schools have the opportunity of exchange programs and learn to speak Spanish, and go to those Spanish-speaking countries.

I'm more than pleased today to speak in favour of this bill and to thank the member from Davenport for continuing the push. I know she's a new member of the Legislature, and not quite a year that she's been here, so well done. I hope you enjoy the Legislature as well as the celebration of your private member's bill moving forward today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's an honour to stand and rise and speak to this important bill. I'd like to start by congratulating the member for Davenport for this wonderful initiative and her leadership for bringing us together around this important piece of legislation.

I have to say that yesterday I was speaking with the member for Davenport and she was talking about how honoured she was to have all-party support. I'm almost as honoured to have an opportunity to speak to this bill. I'd like to tell you why that is and what this bill means.

I know a number of the members from all sides have spoken to the importance of this bill. They've spoken to the contributions that the Hispanic community has made to our province and to our country. They are certainly absolutely correct about that.

I'm not of Hispanic heritage but my grandparents—like many of Hispanic heritage—came to Canada and immigrated to Ontario hoping for a better life for themselves and for their families. My grandfather, in particular, spent a lot of time with me when I was a young boy teaching me about my heritage, sending me to Saturday school, doing homework with me, sharing his history and sharing his culture with me.

I remember after Saturday school we would sit down and he would help me do my Saturday school homework. We would be studying things like history, culture and language. At the time, I maybe didn't appreciate it as much as I do today, how important that was. I remember this one particular occasion where I was frustrated and struggling with my homework, and I said, "Grandfather"—Dido, I used to call him—"can we stop? I've had enough. Why do I have to do this?" He said, "You can't stop, and I'll tell you why. It's not only important that you learn this because it's important that you learn about your own heritage and your own culture and where you come from; it's important because you need to learn about the people who came before you, who made this country—Canada—the great country it is."

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To me this bill is, of course, about celebrating Hispanic heritage and Hispanic culture, but it's also about celebrating the people who came before us of Hispanic heritage, who have helped to build this great country we

live in today. That's what this bill means to me and why I'm so honoured to stand here today.

As someone who is the son of immigrants—my mom was an immigrant—and the grandchild of immigrants, I know that when we celebrate our heritage, we maintain our ties, and we show an appreciation for the trailblazers who came before us, including those in our families but also those beyond, in our broader community. Hispanic culture has, for a long time, been an important component of our collective identity in our city of Toronto, in Etobicoke Centre, the community that I represent, and in our province more broadly.

Mr. Han Dong: Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Even in Trinity–Spadina, absolutely.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: We have lots in Kitchener Centre—

Mr. Yvan Baker: In Kitchener–Centre and all across our province. That's what that speaks to, and others have spoken to that.

While the Hispanic community has a very rich heritage and gives us much to celebrate, this bill aims to recognize not only the cultural contributions of the past but also those of the present and those that will come in the future. You know, when I think about some of the celebrations—and so many of them have been named; I don't need to name them all. I think of the Hispanic Extravaganza, Salsa on St. Clair, the Mexican festival, Hispanic Heritage Week in Hamilton, and this, of course, just to name a few.

The contributions that the Hispanic community has made, as I mentioned, span our province, and they're reflected in many ways in our economic, in our social, in our political and cultural life. But I want to go back to the point I made at the beginning, which is that Hispanic Canadians have played an important role in the development of our province and the development of Canada. They've helped make our province and our country one of the most desirable places to live: As my grandfather used to say, "Canada is a paradise." Hispanic communities played an integral role in making that happen.

In Etobicoke Centre, in my riding, I've had the fortune of getting to know many members of the Hispanic community. I look forward to getting to know many, many more in the months and years to come, to learn from them, to learn about their culture and to learn more about the contributions that they've made.

I'm thrilled, I'm honoured, to be speaking to this bill. I'm so glad we have the support of the members from all sides on this. I look forward to this bill being the foundation of celebrations in the years to come, not only of the contributions of the past and Hispanic culture of the past, but the culture that we will celebrate together and the contributions that, together, the Hispanic community will make to our great country in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: Buenos días, Mr. Speaker.

I'm honoured to rise today to recognize the designation of October as Hispanic Heritage Month. Ontario is

fortunate to count over 400,000 individuals of Hispanic descent who trace their roots to over two dozen nations on three continents, as well as the Caribbean. Many came in search of a better life or to flee war, dictatorship or natural disaster.

We have to sometimes wonder about the weather; I don't think that they were moving here necessarily for the weather, since we all like to vacation so often in their home countries.

Our province is blessed to enjoy the fruits of the Hispanic community's incredible contributions in the realms of education, medicine, commerce, the arts, culture and, of course, sports. In formally proclaiming October as Hispanic Heritage Month, our province will recognize and honour these commitments and provide an avenue for those of Latin heritage to share the richness of their cuisine, language and way of life with all Ontarians.

We're also blessed to have a variety of delightful events that detail the rich culture of Hispanic people. This summer, the sensual sounds of bachata, merengue and reggaeton, as well as the sizzling scent of churros—I think I'm saying that right; I hope so—will fill Mel Lastman Square and dazzle visitors and tourists alike. The date is September 4 to 7, and I have a feeling in future years they might move it to October, weather permitting. They're going to have to decide, because this is an outdoor festival. I'm inviting everybody to join that Hispanic Fiesta for colorido, cultura, música and just a lot of fun and making some new friends, as we just heard.

There are obviously a lot of Hispanic clubs across the province. I think that we're just going to see more community groups and more events as the communities continue to grow.

As the member from London West told us, she has a huge Hispanic population in her riding. I think we're all going to have to go visit, and I'm sure there are some fantastic events and restaurants, and people to visit and people to meet, to learn a little bit about the different heritages that comprise the Hispanic population.

From 2001 to 2011, the Ontario Latin American population jumped 62%, from 106,835 to 172,560. I'm not sure how they get their census numbers, but I think that it speaks for a very growing population. The Hispanic community is the single largest minority in all of North America. That's evident in some of the cultural changes we're seeing through the decades in our lifetime in terms of TV shows and a presence in the movies and things like that, in terms of culture.

Yesterday, we were celebrating Jewish Heritage Month. As the only Jewish member of the PC caucus, I guess I'm an unofficial critic for everything to do with the Jewish community.

It's interesting that the people who joined me to attend the event—one of the sponsors was the member from Davenport, who is bringing forward this bill, so maybe she's going to be the critic of culture over there. Of the individuals who joined me, there were over a dozen from what is called the Sephardic Kehila Centre in my riding of Thornhill. They are basically what we consider to be French-speaking or Latino Jews from countries like

Morocco—and Tangier—and France. They bring their own culture—not just language but, really, culture. It's a very rich, lively, happy community that is definitely growing in my riding.

A couple of people who joined—one was Samuel Keslassy, who was born in Tangier. His wife is Gracia. They have three children and 13 grandchildren. I believe most of them are in Thornhill. Samuel is the vice-president of the Sephardic community in Toronto, and he's very active on Spanish TV, which is Teletatino. He's a real estate agent.

I think that something we all have to consider is that with all of these communities, they look for services in their languages. That just facilitates their adaptation to the country if they can find a real estate agent who maybe knows some of the cultural community that they're looking to locate, where they're looking to purchase a home, perhaps, or to start a business and to rent a place for that.

I really applaud people who move to our country but look for diverse professions that can also help serve their community and be active—on a volunteer basis sometimes, even—in their own community.

Joe Elmaleh was also here yesterday. He's also a member of the Thornhill community and is of Spanish heritage. He has five children with his wife, Shully. His business is Tiara Culinary catering, which is a kosher catering company that provided the food for one of my swearing-ins here at Queen's Park. Again, if we're inviting people from a certain cultural or religious community, we often provide the food for that community as well. I think that we're all aware that we enjoy all the different foods from all the different communities so often in downtown Toronto. We're very lucky to live in a diverse community, because that's part of what it brings. It brings that diversity in terms of culture and in terms of cuisine.

We see a real overlap. We're talking about all these heritage months, but there is a lot of overlap between all the different communities, and I guess what I'm trying to say is that within the Hispanic community there are many different religions and many different ways of celebrating their culture. I think that it behooves us all here to learn as much as we can about all the different communities so that we can understand their needs and provide for them.

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When I was carpooling my kids—and they were a lot younger, obviously—a new family moved from Mexico City to Thornhill, the Gutfraind family. I started to carpool with the wife, Liza; and the husband was Moises. It was sort of cute to me because her three children, I felt like—they weren't triplets, but their names were sort of how you would see triplets' named: Ariela, Daniel, and Gabriel.

It was wonderful. I still remember the first time I showed up to pick up the kids. Usually the mother comes out that first day and you talk for a minute. As I was putting the kids in the car and I waved to her and she went back in the house, she said, "Hola!" That sort of said it all.

I really have to applaud Liza and the whole Gutfraind family because they came to a really new community, all on their own. They didn't come with any family members or friends. They quickly got themselves established. Their kids, that very first year, put on skates and learned how to skate. They'd never seen snow before. They were quickly learning how to ski. I don't know how I would have handled a transition without family members, without friends and all those supports in such a different climate—the language challenges. It's really a testament to the parents when the kids are so well adapted.

I'm just going to say to all of those who come to Ontario and Canada to establish a new life, welcome and hats off to you, but don't be shy to say to your neighbours, "Where can I find a dentist? Where can I find a doctor? Where can I buy certain things?" Just ask for help. Obviously the neighbours—in the old times, people would bring over something new to the neighbours. In many communities, I hear that's still going on, but too often it doesn't.

Just yesterday we heard on the news about a Catholic school that wanted to offer Spanish as one of the core courses. Basically, what they're suggesting is that we could teach geography in Mandarin and we can teach Spanish for history. We all know that children are sponges and they pick up languages so quickly. I really applaud anybody who makes that effort to teach their kids songs in other languages when they're toddlers, because that's really how they begin to learn the accent, and not just celebrate their own heritage but celebrate the fantastic heritage and culture of others in our community.

I look forward to celebrating many events for Hispanic Heritage Month. It's going to be a lot of fun for all of us here in the Legislature if we could do something here.

Gracias to the member for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated April 29, 2015, I am now required to put the question.

Mrs. Martins has moved third reading of Bill 28, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Hispanic Heritage Month.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until after question period today.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

2015 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 29, 2015, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I recognize the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. It's a very distinct honour for me to have the chance to stand in my place this morning to lend my voice in very strong support to Ontario budget 2015.

With the time that I have on the clock, Speaker, I'm going to do my best to cover off a number of areas.

I think that everyone in this Legislature, and beyond, would know that over the last number of weeks, as a result of the leadership shown by Premier Kathleen Wynne, Finance Minister Charles Sousa and a number of colleagues of ours on this side of the House, we are moving forward with a very ambitious plan. One of the core fundamental elements of this year's budget, as it has been in past years' budgets, was that determination to move forward with what we call the Moving Ontario Forward plan. This is \$31.5 billion that will be invested across the province of Ontario: roughly \$15 billion for transit, transportation and other forms of critical infrastructure outside the GTHA, and also about \$16 billion to be invested over that same decade in transit projects inside the GTHA.

We've seen evidence over the last number of days—in the run-up to the budget itself, around budget day and certainly following budget day—of a continued commitment on the part of this Premier and this government to make sure that we deal with those issues, particularly here in the GTHA, relating to gridlock, but also those issues outside the GTHA as they relate to making sure that we continue to invest in expanding and building out our highways, supporting our municipal partners with their infrastructure needs, and moving forward, for example, on natural gas initiatives and so many others.

I've had the real privilege over the last few days to be in places like Mississauga—not that many days ago—to announce that our government is moving forward with the \$1.6-billion Hurontario-Main LRT, which will assist Peel region residents, those living in Mississauga and Brampton, with connecting to GO regional express rail, which I'll talk about in a second, and also having that option to leave their cars at home.

Again, not that many days ago, I was in Etobicoke, standing alongside the member from Etobicoke North and the member from York West—the minister responsible for seniors—to announce that the government is moving forward with the \$1.2-billion Finch LRT, which will connect Humber College with the new Keele-Finch West station that's being built as a result of the Toronto-York Spadina subway extension right at the edge of York University, connecting two post-secondary institutions through to priority neighbourhoods, to give that kind of economic uplift to that part.

Also, the Friday before, the Premier and I were in Barrie—represented, of course, very capably by our friend and colleague the member from Barrie—to announce the government's 10-year plan: GO regional express rail, a \$13.5-billion plan that will literally transform GO—the entire GO network—into a fast and frequent regional rail service. What that means is that in core areas, we'll be running electrified, two-way, all-day GO service on most

of our corridors at up to 15-minute intervals, and we'll be dramatically increasing the frequency of train trips across all of our corridors. Communities from Kitchener-Waterloo to Richmond Hill to Stouffville to Barrie to Newmarket to Aurora to Bradford—and the list goes on—will benefit from these investments. I'm very proud to be participating in all of these.

When I talk about the GTHA—and I will talk a little bit more about outside the GTHA in just a quick second, including the Highway 407 East extension, of which I was very proud to announce phase 2, and \$1.2 billion, to support our friends in Durham region and Peterborough and elsewhere with respect to making sure we have that highway built.

By the way, Speaker, Highway 407 East, the highway that the tolls are collected from—we will make sure that it remains in public hands, not like what we all know occurred the last time. Another government, a Conservative government, decided to sell the original 407 ETR to the private sector.

When I think about the investments that we're making in transit infrastructure in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area—and this list goes on; there's more that I could mention—what I think about is an individual living in the 905, as do I right now, someone who spent his entire life in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. I think of the options that we're going to be providing to people like my own daughters, and my seven-year-old daughter, in particular.

I think of a 10-year investment time frame for these projects, and I say to myself and to my wife that our daughter, Talia, who is seven years of age right now—in a decade, what will these investments mean for her and for people of her cohort? It will give them, because of these investments, because of the leadership of the Premier, so many additional options with respect to connecting across this network. Whether she ultimately chooses to live—or go to school—in the GTHA or in other parts of Ontario, she will have a wide array of options at her disposal.

We are making these decisions today to, yes, deal with congestion and gridlock on our roads today, but we are also making these decisions because they will provide a brighter future for people like my daughters, the children who live across this region right now, and for so many others as well.

Speaker, I don't have much time left on the clock. I do want to mention that as part of this budget as well—I think of communities like Ottawa, the fact that we are supporting phase 1 of their LRT and will be at the table for the discussion around phase 2. I think of the LRT that is currently being constructed, phase 1, in Kitchener-Waterloo, the ION. We're there at the table for phase 1; we'll be there at the table for phase 2. I think of future transit opportunities that will be existing in cities like London that we're going to be there for.

Not that many days ago, I was up in Sault Ste. Marie with two of my colleagues to announce that we are re-establishing a stand-alone Connecting Links fund to sup-

port nearly 80 communities across this province. When I think of highways in the north that need to be four-laned, including the highway from Kenora to the Manitoba border, it remains a priority for this government to make sure that we accomplish it over the next number of years.

None of these projects could proceed without the leadership shown by Premier Kathleen Wynne, Finance Minister Charles Sousa and the Ontario Liberal government, embedded in this year's budget. I call on everyone to support this budget and help us build Ontario up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 1010 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to introduce, from the Canadian Cancer Society, the Peterborough chapter, which also represents my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, Anita Record and Mark Donohue. If you're in the Legislature somewhere—there you are—please stand up. Thank you, and welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Page captain Joshua Rosenberg's mother, Dr. Marsh Rosenberg, is in the private members' gallery. I'd like to welcome her to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to introduce Lera Ryan from the great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for all her work with the Canadian Cancer Society, and all of the people in the gallery from the Canadian Cancer Society. Welcome.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Today is Girls Government from Parkdale-High Park. We've got Shannon Gill, Phoebejade Nuqui, Katie Delay, Maya Olszewska, Micah Joyce Marcelino, Heidi McIntyre, Elizabeth Efrem, Eesha Manahil, Afia Lodhi, Sumaiya Uddin, Scout Collins, Ekshitha Gade, and Ms. Demmings from Holy Family school and Ms. Clarke from Queen Victoria, all here to see the House in session.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to introduce to the House today a very active member of the Oakville Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Mike Newell. Accompanying Mike today is Mike's nine-year-old son from St. Luke's in Clearview, Liam Newell. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, I have quite a number of guests here today for the passing of Ryan's Law. We've got Sandra Gibbons, Judy Legg, George Habib, Chris Yaccato, Peter Glazier, Logan Glazier, Ayden Glazier, Kari-Anne Forsythe, Andrea Stevens Lavigne, Nicola Thomas, Lori Pallen, Sherry Zarins, Carole Madeley, Noah Farber, Rob Oliphant, Kate Wallace, John Chenery, Darren Fisher and, from my riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London, for the cancer society, Carole Watson.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is my pleasure to introduce and welcome friends from the riding of Essex, Windsor-Essex and the surrounding areas who are here with the Canadian Cancer Society: Emily Brett, Eillish Coughlin, Samantha Girard, Alysha Rosaasen, Kamal Mann and Kelly Rosaasen. Today they were here—myself and my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh met with them. We had a great meeting. Thank you so much for taking part in all the work that you do. Thanks so much.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Speaker, I'd like to introduce to the House my brother Michael Ballard, who's here to keep an eye on me today, from the great riding of Willowdale.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome some very strong advocates for the Canadian Cancer Society from the Quinte region: Amy Doyle, Tracey Reid and Karen White. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm very happy to announce that we have in the gallery with us today city of Toronto councillor, and chair of the Toronto Transit Commission, Josh Colle.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to make the commitment that all introductions will be done. You know that I try to do that. But just as a reminder, there is no wearing of the badges until unanimous consent comes, please. It's simple, not complicated.

The member from Dufferin—Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I would like you to help me introduce and welcome from St. Michael Catholic Secondary School in Bolton the students who are joining us at Queen's Park.

Mr. Paul Miller: There are too many to read, but we have a lot of famous Canadian actors and actresses here with us. Some are up there; some are in other places. Welcome to Queen's Park. It's going to be a wonderful day.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I would like to acknowledge Clarington fire chief Gord Weir and Chris Ostler, who are here today with the Canadian Cancer Society. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to welcome Leanne Waddell from the cancer society here to Queen's Park. I only wish that the Premier and half of her cabinet were here.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. As the member does know—not should know—that's highly inappropriate and unacceptable. He has not done himself a favour for today.

The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to also introduce people from the Canadian Cancer Society, starting with Pam Patry, who is from Sudbury. We also have people that I admire very much: Joanne Di Nardo, Kelly Gorman, Nicole McInerney and Elizabeth Harvey. Welcome to Queen's Park. It's always good to work with you.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to introduce to the House today Severino Centritto, Duberlis Ramos, Mauricio Ospina and Monica Linares, who are

here today to hear third reading of Bill 28, Hispanic Heritage Month.

I'd also like to introduce my parents, José and Arminda Bento, in the gallery.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to welcome from the Canadian Cancer Society, from my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, our representative here today: Roger Martin. I hope that he enjoys the proceedings.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to welcome all those from Timmins—James Bay who are here with the Canadian Cancer Society and wish them well. I hope I can meet you back in the riding. I can't do it today—House leaders meetings and all that, I'm a bit busy.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'd like to welcome Anita Record and the team from the Peterborough office from the Canadian Cancer Society. I couldn't make the breakfast this morning.

I'd also like to welcome Peggy and Elizabeth Shownessy and Leonard Hall, who are in the east members' gallery. They're joining me today because they won lunch with an MPP.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I too would like to welcome the members from the Canadian Cancer Society in North Bay: Mr. Gil Pharand, the manager; "The Debster" Deb Marson; and Carly Brown from the Soo.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to welcome some dear friends of mine: Dr. Chris Richardson and lifelong friend Kirsten Richardson, who are visiting today at the Legislature.

Hon. David Oraziatti: I'm pleased to welcome to the gallery Mary Lou Tims, who is the mother of my legislative assistant Jeff Costen, and his brother, Sean Costen. Welcome to the gallery.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'd like to welcome teacher Chris Ford and his politics class from St. Joan of Arc in Barrie today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted to welcome my former staffer Jon Feairs to the gallery today. Welcome.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to introduce two good friends here today: Carole Paikin-Miller is here, as well as Margo Duncan. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: On behalf of my colleague Minister Chan, I'd like to introduce a page from Markham—Unionville. Today, Jae Min Han is our page captain.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I would also like to take the opportunity to welcome over 90 Canadian Cancer Society volunteers and staff from across the province, who are here at Queen's Park today to raise awareness about cancer control with all of us. Welcome to the Legislature. In the members' gallery, we have with us Joanne Di Nardo, Kelly Gorman, Florentina Stancu-Soare, Julie Datta, Nicole McInerney, Shadi Nia, Kalaisan Kalaichelvan and Christie Liang.

WEARING OF PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on a point of order.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear yellow daffodil pins in recognition of the Canadian Cancer Society's Daffodil Month and MPP education day at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is seeking unanimous consent to wear the daffodils. Just to make sure that everyone has access, both galleries have got them, and I saw that there was a rush to put them on as quickly as possible.

Do we agree? Agreed.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, I know. I noticed that.

It is now time for question period.

1040

ORAL QUESTIONS

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier, yesterday's AG report makes it clear that your dogged refusal to hear ministry staff warnings about the severe impacts of your cost-cutting winter road maintenance contracts led to serious injury and even death. The auditor is calling you out on your careless decisions to save a few bucks on the backs of Ontario motorists. You toyed with the lives of Ontarians. You weighed the potential for \$36 million in savings versus the potential for injuries and fatalities, and you ran straight for the cash.

Now the auditor tells us that your inaction has led to hundreds of lawsuits, and this report will likely mean many more on the way. Deputy Premier, given the injuries and fatalities—as well as, now, the hundreds of lawsuits—could you tell us if the \$36 million in savings was actually worth it?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

I'm going to immediately jump on anyone who, when I'm standing and getting quiet, starts talking. They will get it.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member opposite for that question today. Of course, it's a very important issue.

As I said yesterday in response to the auditor's report, we do thank her for the work and for the work of her team with respect to this thorough and thoughtful review. As was noted in her report, the Ministry of Transportation accepts all eight of the recommendations that the auditor has brought forward. I'm sure I'll have a chance to talk a little bit more about that in a second.

But I should also point out, Speaker, that in 2013, before the auditor was asked by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Five years after you let this happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton, come to order.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Before the public accounts committee made the request to have the AG come in, the Ministry of Transportation conducted a comprehensive review of the winter maintenance program. As a result of the work that the ministry undertook since 2013, we've added 55 pieces of equipment in northern Ontario, 50 pieces of equipment in southern Ontario, 20 area co-ordinators, a new director of maintenance and five area engineers to build in the oversight that we know is required in this program.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Minister, the warning lights were everywhere, and your government turned a blind eye. Your own ministry officials were sounding alarm bells, and you covered your ears. Opposition members were calling on the government to throw this into reverse, but you stepped on the gas, ensuring that faulty contracts you introduced in 2009 would give you the savings you needed, and to heck with the consequences. Meanwhile, our highways were littered with pileups, closures and fatalities, calling out for attention and immediate action.

In the last year alone, Minister, we've seen every major highway—the QEW, the 401, the 400 and countless in the north—hit with pileups, gridlock and, sadly, fatalities.

Minister, what do you say to those motorists, to those injured, to those families who lost loved ones? At the very least, you owe them an apology.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member opposite again for his follow-up question.

As I said yesterday, I am quite determined to accept full responsibility for making sure that, following up on the auditor's report, we do take the action required to make sure that Ontario drivers, for next winter and for all winters beyond, have confidence in the system—as they certainly should. In addition to accepting all eight recommendations, and in addition to the concrete action that we took following our own comprehensive review in 2013, by next winter season, the Ministry of Transportation will have 28 additional roadside cameras to monitor road conditions, a pilot project in place for the public to track the location of the plows, more roadside weather stations to update changing weather, and a revamped 511 website that's easier to read and will have time-stamped information moving forward with respect to real-time display—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Michael Harris: Minister, invest in the roads, not the bureaucracies.

Minister, your refusal to apologize shows a breath-taking, shameful lack of empathy, especially given legislation on the books allowing for proper acknowledge-

ment and apology in exactly these types of situations. Yet yesterday, as the Toronto Star reported, you as transportation minister refused to apologize.

Minister, where I come from, if you do the wrong thing and you've hurt someone, you say you're sorry. The AG report right here makes it clear that your government mishandled winter road maintenance. People were hurt. Do the right thing today, Minister, and apologize to Ontarians.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. Of course, what the member opposite, not surprisingly, would refuse to acknowledge in this House is that that same Auditor General's report acknowledges—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward—Hastings—second time.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —that over the last 13 years, Ontario has ranked first or second in North America for highway safety.

That same auditor's report would also acknowledge that from 2003 until 2012, the number of deaths on Ontario highways relating to winter conditions had reduced. That same auditor's report acknowledges and praises the Ministry of Transportation for the concrete action that we took, following our own—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton will come to order—second time.

Carry on.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As I was saying, Speaker, that same auditor's report acknowledges and praises the Ministry of Transportation for the concrete action we've taken since our internal review.

Do I accept responsibility for getting this right? I certainly do, Speaker. I'll keep working hard to make sure we deliver an outcome the people—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Amidst all the noise you manufactured about last week's budget, you tried to quietly slip past the public some very important changes, but yesterday, the Auditor General called you out. She said that your proposed changes to the Government Advertising Act would allow you to put out a bunch of self-congratulatory ads, all at taxpayers' expense.

To make matters worse, when asked why you were making the changes, you pointed the finger at the Auditor General, even though her office has rejected less than 1% of your proposed ads.

Deputy Premier, why are you once again attacking the integrity of the Auditor General to cover up your own partisan political moves?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to discuss this. We introduced legislation in 2004, the Government Advertising Act, that would ban the partisan ads that we saw over and over and over again, starting none other than Premier Mike Harris. Those ads were a complete misuse of taxpayers' money. They were partisan ads. We wanted to ensure that would—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If there's any doubt that I'm going to attempt to try to get some décorum—don't doubt.

Minister of Agriculture—second time. Member from Nipissing, and the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry—in case you didn't think I heard.

Please finish.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We wanted to ensure that taxpayer dollars would never be wasted on that kind of partisan ad again, and that principle will be maintained in the amendments to this legislation that clarify—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You'll have a wrap-up sentence.

The member from Simcoe North and the member from Dufferin—Caledon, come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This legislation expands her oversight of our advertising, and it clarifies what is in fact considered partisan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: That answer is insulting to the Auditor General, and it's insulting to Ontarians. Your proposed changes would threaten the credibility and reputation of the Auditor General.

Yesterday, Ms. Lysyk basically said her office is not going to play the part of patsy for you. She called your proposed changes “free campaign advertising.” You can't get much clearer than that.

Deputy Premier, will you heed the Auditor General's warning and withdraw the proposed changes to the Government Advertising Act?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Be seated, please.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our goal with the original legislation was to put an end to those Mike Harris-style ads. Now we find ourselves colouring red bricks brown. We maintain our commitment to restrict advertising. This strengthens and expands the oversight.

1050

I have to say I am quite surprised that a member of the Conservative Party is talking about government advertising. I look forward to the third question to discuss some of the work that's under way by their federal cousins.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Deputy Premier: We know this government is desperate to control the damage to its reputation. For the first time—

Hon. Charles Sousa: That shirt looks a bit too blue. Maybe that's an ad.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Finance, second time.

Mr. Jim Wilson: —we see a sitting Premier being interviewed by the OPP in a criminal investigation. It's no wonder that this government is looking for any means to repair that damage, particularly when they can get someone else to pay for it—that someone else being the Ontario taxpayer.

Deputy Premier, your proposed changes to the Government Advertising Act are fooling no one, especially the Auditor General. Why are you asking taxpayers to pay for your partisan campaign-style ads? Smarten up. Be honest with the people. Do the right thing and withdraw these amendments in your budget bill.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think people will be interested to know that the entire PC caucus voted against the original Government Advertising Act. I think people will also be interested to know that we are looking at third-party advertising, which is a request that the Progressive Conservative Party has made. We are looking at third-party advertising.

But let's look and see what the federal Conservatives are doing. They spent \$52 million—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Leeds–Grenville is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Government and Consumer Services, come to order.

Please finish.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, methinks I have touched a nerve.

The government spent 52 million taxpayer dollars advertising the economic action plan in 2009 and 2010 alone; another \$21 million in 2011-12; and \$14.8 million—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Deputy Premier. The Premier's sell-off of Hydro One will pay for less than 3% of her transit infrastructure promises. You don't need to sell Hydro One to build transit or infrastructure in this province. The only people who are going to benefit from the sale of this hydro asset are a small group of bankers and consultants, and it will leave families and businesses with higher hydro bills.

The plan is bad for Ontarians, plain and simple. Will the Liberals stop their wrong-headed sale of Hydro One?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I go—the member from Beaches–East York will come to order. The Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, come to order—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —and if I hear another one, he'll get warned immediately.

Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think only the NDP could pretend that billions of dollars was something to sniff at. We're estimating that the sale will be about \$9 billion. That is an enormous amount of money in assets owned by the people of Ontario that will be converted into assets owned by the people of Ontario.

The NDP pretends that they want to build infrastructure. Every time we have moved forward on an ability to build that infrastructure, they have stood in the way.

We are moving forward with our plans to build the much-needed infrastructure, and we will bring our resources to the table to make sure that happens and it happens soon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Since Monday, almost 15,000 people from across Ontario have sent the Premier the message that they don't want to pay for another one of her wrong decisions. Families don't want to see their hydro bills going up. Families don't want to lose control of the future of our energy system in this province—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development, second time.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Will the Liberals listen to Ontarians and pull the plug on privatizing Hydro One?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The third party is very, very good at saying what they don't want us to do. We would welcome their advice on how to accelerate investments in infrastructure.

Let's look at what we're doing when it comes to building much-needed infrastructure—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're talking about the largest infrastructure investment in the history of this province, \$130 billion to build roads, bridges, transit and other badly needed infrastructure across the province. That's over 100,000 jobs each year that we are creating with this investment.

The third party has no plan. If they develop a plan, we'd sure like to hear it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier is ignoring the people of Ontario. They do not want her to sell their Hydro One. It is bad for families, and it is bad for business and our economy. The only people it's good for are consultants, bankers and Liberal insiders.

Why are the Liberals more interested—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Trinity–Spadina, second time.

Ms. Andrea Horwath:—in helping out a handful of their friends than they are in listening to the people of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, that's kind of a stunning assertion, because the people of this province will benefit from the infrastructure we will be able to build as a result of this decision.

I think people who are looking forward to 15-minute service from Union Station to Bramalea would actually say they benefit from this. I think people benefitting from the Northern Highways projects will benefit from this. I think people in communities across this province will benefit from the Connecting Links program. I think people in London are delighted that we are moving forward on the environmental assessment for high-speed rail.

This is about benefitting the people of Ontario. It's about bringing our assets to their highest use.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My second question is back to the Deputy Premier.

Selling Hydro One is going to mean higher bills. I haven't talked to a single Ontarian who wants higher bills. It's going to mean giving—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Minister of Children and Youth Services will come to order, as will everyone.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's going to mean giving away control of a strategic asset that supports jobs, innovation and growth.

Selling Hydro One might be the right decision for bankers, consultants and Liberal insiders, but it is the wrong decision for the people of Ontario. Whose corner are the Liberals in?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, as I have said, the people of this province are going to benefit enormously from the investments in infrastructure made possible by this and other decisions. I think former NDP cabinet minister Frances Lankin understands why this is a benefit to Ontarians. This is not about ideology; this is about making those new investments that are critically important to the prosperity of this province.

Maybe Don MacKinnon, the president of the Power Workers' Union, could convince the leader of the third party that this is good news. He says, "The Power Workers' Union welcomes and supports the decision by government to keep Hydro One whole in an IPO process that would, in partnership with government, broaden the ownership structure in Hydro One. This will position the company to grow and provide further high-skill quality jobs" for Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier's plan was sneaky. She kept Ontarians in the dark. People don't like the Premier's plan to sell Hydro One. Almost 15,000 people have sent that message to the Liberals in less than four days.

The city of Toronto will be debating a motion that says stop the sale of Hydro One. That motion was actually seconded by Shelley Carroll, who endorsed the Premier during the Liberal leadership.

Are the Liberals ready to listen to the people of Ontario and pull the plug on this plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member of the third party might call this "sneaky," but what that really tells us is that she hasn't been reading the budget, she hasn't been reading the economic statements, because we have been very, very clear, open and transparent. The 2014 Liberal platform and the 2014 budget, which outlined the fiscal plan that the NDP ran on, mentioned very clearly—I'll happily pass over the 2014 budget for the leader to remind herself what's in there.

1100

In October, the advisory council released their interim report. The report was made public before the budget. We've been debating this issue in the House for months. That will continue and the legislation will be subject to public hearings and debate. The council has consulted widely on this. We believe the right decision for the people of Ontario is to move forward. The NDP is stuck in their ideology.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier doesn't seem at all interested in hearing from anyone other than her hand-picked insiders. She doesn't want to hear what the auditor has to say about wasted billions and about partisan advertising. She doesn't want any public Ombudsman oversight, auditor oversight, freedom of information oversight or Integrity Commissioner oversight at Hydro One. She certainly doesn't want to hear from the most important people of all, the people of Ontario, the voters of Ontario. Her plan is arrogant and it leaves people paying the price for another bad Liberal decision.

Will the Liberals do the right thing, stop listening to their hand-picked insiders and listen to the hard truth that selling Hydro One is the wrong thing for the province of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think we're hearing loud and clear that this is about ideology, that they just believe it's the wrong thing, without being able to back that up with any kind of evidence. Their assertion that rates will rise is completely false. They have nothing that will back that up. In fact, the experts are saying that this will put downward pressure on electricity rates. There is a huge potential in Hydro One. I look forward to seeing what will happen to Hydro One as it gets more efficient.

Something that we haven't talked about much in this debate is that we're facilitating local distribution companies to actually consolidate—again, improving their efficiency and reducing, putting downward pressure, on those rates.

When it comes to oversight, the member opposite, although she is very clear about not trusting the private sector at all, which is kind of astonishing in itself—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh yes, you will. New question.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I'm going back to the Deputy Premier.

Last summer the government quietly released a report from pension expert Jim Leech about hydro pensions. It was quite scathing, actually. The government report stated that hydro workers in Ontario were getting \$5 of taxpayer money for every \$1 that they put in.

Now you're claiming and your government is claiming a net-zero solution by giving workers shares of Hydro One, which you're selling, and confusing it even more as you're giving OPG hydro workers these as well in exchange for reducing their gold-plated pensions. If the value of the shares and the value of the pension changes are equal, as you suggest, then the province hasn't saved a single dollar.

Minister, will you admit that the pension mess you've created in hydro is being put directly on the backs of ratepayers in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are very pleased that a tentative agreement has been reached with the Power Workers' Union. It is a net-zero deal, but it is out for ratification. I'm not going to comment on a deal that actually is before the members of that union so they can make their decision about ratification. I'm going to respect that process.

But I am very, very pleased that the leadership of the Power Workers' Union has expressed support. I'm actually very excited that workers who work in Hydro One are demonstrating that they may be interested in being owners of that—partial owners. I really believe when workers own part of the company they're working for, that makes for a stronger company.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Deputy Premier, that concerns me very much, the response that you just gave me, for two reasons. The first is, you're plugging one leak by starting another. Yesterday we talked about your mandate letter and your failure to meet it. Today you're just suggesting again that you're not prepared whatsoever to have any efficiencies in government or reduce the bottom line in this province. Your net zero really means this is going to go on the backs of the ratepayers.

This second thing really concerns me: The Premier has consistently said the selling of Hydro is going to invest in infrastructure, but now we know what's really on the books: Your plan to sell Hydro One is to pay off pensions. That concerns every single ratepayer in Ontario who is going to have to foot the bill for this so-called solution.

You can't even execute a fire sale properly. Will you admit to the ratepayers of this province that you are actually selling Hydro One in order to pay these pensions?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry—as I threatened and warned—is warned.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, as I said earlier, I really do want to respect the process. This is a tentative deal that has been reached. It is in the hands of members for ratification. I can assure the member opposite that it is a net-zero deal. I am delighted about that. It is a deal that moves us in the right direction when it comes to addressing the pension issues raised in the Leech report.

Speaker, we were the ones who commissioned the Leech report, and we are the ones who are acting on it.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Yesterday, Ontario's independent Auditor General said the Liberal government is trying to gut the rules that stop public dollars from being spent on Harper-style partisan advertising: "These proposed changes would allow the government to spend public dollars on partisan advertising with little of the current independent oversight."

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader—second time.

Ms. Catherine Fife: "The government could flood the province with self-congratulatory and self-promotional advertising that would be of little practical use to the citizens paying for it."

Why are the Liberals taking a page out of Stephen Harper's playbook so that they can spend public money on these partisan advertisements instead of spending money on schools, on health care or even on transit infrastructure?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, what we are doing is expanding oversight of the Auditor General, at her request, to include kinds of advertising that are not currently covered in the legislation. As I say, that was at her request, so we are moving forward on that.

We are also looking at how the act is being implemented. What we have seen is legislation that was intended to prevent any government ever again running the kind of wasteful ads that Mike Harris ran. What we are doing is, we are clarifying what we mean by "partisan."

We remain absolutely committed to ensuring that taxpayer dollars are not spent on partisan ads. This amended legislation will do exactly that.

I would like to comment, Speaker, that Ontario is the only jurisdiction in the country—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Simcoe North—second time.

Hon. Deborah Matthews:—that has any legislation restricting that kind of advertising.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to say we trust the Auditor General more than we trust what's coming out of the Deputy Premier's mouth, any day of the week.

It's important to also remember that the Deputy Premier sang a different tune when she was speaking to legislation that restricted partisan ads in the past. In 2004, in this Legislature, she spoke about some constituents who told her, "Please remember that when you spend money, you are spending our money."

Those constituents inspired the Deputy Premier to then add, "It's just outrageous to me that governments spend money on what are, in essence, political pieces."

Meanwhile, in Ottawa, Justin Trudeau, the leader of the third party, says he's got a problem with public dollars being spent on partisan ads. But in Ontario, the Liberals are gutting the rules so she can use public dollars to run their own partisan ads.

Can the Deputy Premier explain why the Liberals think Ontario families should pay for Stephen Harper-style partisan advertising that promotes the interests of the Liberal Party of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are very, very clear: In fact, we are world leaders when it comes to restricting partisan government advertising—

Laughter.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The members opposite may laugh at that, Speaker, but there is no other jurisdiction in this country—in fact, I think you'd have to go to Australia to find the closest jurisdiction that has anything like this kind of legislation.

Let's be clear about what we're doing. We're expanding oversight to include other forms of advertising. We're providing a clear definition of "partisan" advertising. We're requiring the government to submit a preliminary review of the ad to the Auditor General, and we're reinforcing rules around government advertising during elections.

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We are also moving to strengthen third-party advertising regulations, because we heard from the Chief Electoral Officer and we believe that we need to do something on this front. We are making changes that will strengthen the legislation—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is the Minister of Education. Child care provides a strong foundation for our youngest learners, and we are committed to modernizing child care in Ontario. Giving children the best possible start in life and ensuring that families have access to safe and modern child care is a top priority for our government. I know that for the constituents of my riding of Barrie, access to safe and modern child care is a very important issue. As a former teacher, I know how import-

ant it is for families to know that their children are cared for and safe when they are left in the care of others.

Minister, can you please tell us how we are ensuring we are giving children the best possible start in life?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member from Barrie for her advocacy for children. Since 2003, licensed child care spaces have increased by 70% to 317,868 spaces, providing more than 130,000 additional children with safe and reliable care. Since 2004, child care funding has increased from \$532 million to over \$1 billion. That's a 90% increase. Just yesterday, our government announced that we are creating approximately 4,000 new child care spaces for Ontario families. We announced that over the next three years, \$120 million in new funding will be dedicated to building safe, high-quality licensed child care spaces in schools all across Ontario, another milestone—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister. We know that our government recognizes the importance of investing in our children's future. We recognize the role that schools can play as a location for these programs that benefit children, families and the community. Increasing child care spaces in local schools is an important component of our government's commitment to community hubs. Our government wants to improve coordinated planning among the school boards, the municipalities and the community organizations.

Minister, I know that constituents in Barrie will be pleased to hear about the investment of \$120 million in new funding to create new child care spaces for Ontario families. Can you please tell this House how my community will be eligible to access funding to meet the demand for affordable child care in our community?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Our government is proud to invest in families by supporting a modernized child care and early years system with more capacity to care for our youngest learners. Adding approximately 4,000 child care spaces for pre-schoolers in local schools is an important step toward building Ontario up.

School boards and Consolidated Municipal Service Managers, or CMSMs, in southern Ontario, or District Social Service Administration Boards, or DSSABs, in northern Ontario, will work together to identify eligible schools that meet the criteria, and what we're particularly looking for is underserved areas—to support local need and apply through future rounds of the Ministry of Education's capital priorities and school consolidation capital. I believe that in Barrie, the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager is the county of Simcoe, so the Simcoe—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Acting Premier. I believe that honesty is the best policy, and the people of Ontario deserve honesty from their elected

officials. That's why so many were shocked to learn of your government's plan to sell off Hydro One as a quick fix for your spending addiction, without any mention of this radical plan during the election. On-peak hydro rates have gone up by over 49% since October 2011. This decision will drive hydro costs even higher. People deserve to know what's coming so they can get ready as best they can.

My question, Acting Premier, is simply this: Just how high will hydro rates soar to pay for your broken Green Energy Act and countless other boondoggles?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I, too, believe that honesty is the best policy. That's why we were very honest in the 2014 budget. Let me read from the 2014 budget: "The government will look at maximizing and unlocking value from assets it currently holds, including real estate holdings as well as Crown corporations such as Ontario Power Generation, Hydro One and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario."

That was in the 2014 budget. That was repeated in the second 2014 budget. It was repeated in the fall economic statement. It was repeated in the 2015 budget. There is nothing that has been hidden from the people. It was also in our platform.

I look forward to the supplementary to talk about that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Back to the Acting Premier: The people of Chatham-Kent-Essex and those throughout the province cannot plan their budgets based on platitudes. My constituents have been inundated with over 600 industrial wind turbines but have not seen any relief on their bills whatsoever.

Just yesterday, an elderly constituent of mine showed me his Hydro One bill. He's paying far more in delivery fees than he is on hydro.

The over 18,000-plus people in Ridgetown and other areas surrounding Chatham-Kent not being serviced by Entegris deserve lower rates. They need a better hydro provider choice where they can have lower and more stable rates, especially for those low-income families and those on fixed incomes.

Seniors have budgeted for their retirement but they didn't budget for this government's reckless hydro abandonment.

Acting Premier, my question is simple: Will you allow these residents to change their local distribution company provider before you sell off Hydro One so that they can afford their hydro bills?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm glad to hear the member opposite talking about the burden of energy rates on, particularly, low-income families. This is a challenge that we are really concerned about as well, which is why we are introducing programs—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, second time.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —to help those low-income families who are struggling with their hydro bills.

I'm glad to know that the member opposite, and I assume his party, will support our initiatives to reduce energy bills for those with lowest incomes.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, as the government planned its Hydro One fire sale, the Auditor General released a report which showed that, once again, yet another Liberal privatization experiment has failed. The report shows that Liberal privatization has made our winter roads unsafe.

The NDP has raised this issue countless times and the government keeps saying, "Trust us. We know what we're doing. Things will get better." But they never do.

In light of the failures of this plan and the increased danger of Ontario roads in the winter, will your government admit that the privatization of the winter maintenance program has failed and apologize to the residents of Ontario for making our roads unsafe?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member from the NDP for that question. As I said earlier today, we certainly do take the auditor's findings very seriously, as it relates to the winter maintenance program.

One of the reasons that we launched the internal review back in 2013 at the Ministry of Transportation was because we understood that there were questions being asked. As a result of that review—I mentioned this earlier today—after the 2013 winter, 105 pieces of equipment were deployed both in southern and northern Ontario. Those pieces of equipment helped with truck climbing and passing lanes in the north, and they helped clear ramps and shoulders more quickly in the south.

Not that many weeks ago I had the privilege to attend, alongside many colleagues in this House, the OGRA/ROMA conference. At that particular gathering, I heard directly from municipal leaders representing communities like Red Rock, Red Lake, Terrace Bay, Ear Falls and others, who told me that following the action we took as a ministry following our review, they noticed a discernible improvement in winter maintenance in their communities.

It doesn't mean our work is done. As I said earlier today, we accept all eight recommendations from the auditor. We will keep working hard and we'll get it right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Minister, the contractors should have had the equipment when you awarded them the contract. Taking responsibility isn't an apology.

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Mr. Speaker, the Premier was transportation minister when many of these winter road maintenance contracts were signed. She agreed to let contractors decide for themselves whether they felt like ploughing the roads after a snowstorm. She thought it was a good idea to put contractors in charge of policing their own performance, while keeping any performance penalties secret. Even today, her government refuses to release these contracts,

the inspection records and the penalties. Will this government stop protecting these private contractors and start protecting the public by releasing these documents today?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: One of the things that I didn't have the chance to mention earlier is that just last week, in budget 2015, measures were included that, if that budget is passed, will permit the Ministry of Transportation to provide dedicated funding to increase, for example, the use of what are called de-icing liquids before the start of a storm in winters to come. In addition, we'll be able to work with our contractors as a result of budget 2015 to add dedicated spreaders for sand and salt in select northern communities and also in congested urban areas.

The other thing that I said yesterday in response to the auditor, Speaker, is that because I have confidence that we will get this right, and because I also believe it's important for us to be held accountable, I have written to the auditor and I have asked her to come back in and provide a progress update following winter 2015-16. That's the accountability this government deserves to put forward to the people of Ontario.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. After learning that the Leamington District Memorial Hospital intended to close its obstetric services, many in the community began expressing their concerns through letters, media interviews, news reports and petitions. Concerns were expressed by Ontarians over the potential risk of having no birthing choice but travelling to Windsor. Having worked as a nurse, I understand the need for patients and mothers-to-be in emergency situations to have access to care close to home. It's much different in a large city, where alternative services are more readily available.

Hospitals in small towns like Leamington are important employers, playing a significant role in the local economy, helping to attract new residents and encouraging others to stay.

Through you, Speaker, can the minister tell this House, what is our government doing to ensure that the voices of the community of Leamington are being heard?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member from Cambridge for this very important question. When I first heard about this issue in Leamington, in October, I immediately reached out to the Erie St. Clair LHIN, the local health integration network, and to the hospital as well. Mr. Speaker, our government understands the unique role that hospitals in small towns and small communities play across this province. That unique relationship is part of the reason why I asked the LHIN to press the pause button before any decision was made. It was important to me and to the LHIN that more time be taken to consult with members of the community and to hear their thoughts and concerns before any decision was made.

Our government provided financial support to allow the hospital and LHIN time to consider all possible op-

tions. The LHIN created an expert panel involving municipal leaders, community members and clinical experts to review the situation.

I'm proud to say that we released the expert panel's report yesterday. Now that the report is complete, it's time for the community to provide their—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Minister, for the great work being done to address this issue for the community of Leamington.

I'm really pleased to hear that the expert panel considered the content of all consultations and considered the views expressed by many who wrote to the hospital about the planned closure of the obstetrics unit.

I know how important hospitals are to communities, as my own constituents know how important it is to have quick access to the right care at the Cambridge Memorial Hospital. After many years of advocacy and work with our local LHIN, residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries saw the start of an expansion project that will bring new and expanded services, including an updated obstetrics unit, to Cambridge. In fact, the minister was with me to see the ground-breaking last fall.

I hope the public continues to be engaged and speak up for the community. Speaker, through you to the minister, how can the public continue to engage on the planned closure of the Leamington obstetrics unit?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I am certainly proud of the process that has been undertaken so far. This is the community's turn, so I don't want to prejudice their reaction to the expert panel's report, but the expert panel does recommend a very innovative solution that will in fact allow live birthings to continue to take place at the Leamington hospital and support that community.

The public can visit the Erie St. Clair LHIN's website and provide direct feedback to the report already. There's also a public meeting scheduled for next Tuesday, May 5, at the Roma Club in Leamington, where the expert panel will present their report to the public and to the Erie St. Clair board. They'll be there. Following that, the public will have a 30-day period to provide additional feedback directly to the LHIN.

I want to applaud both the LHIN and the Leamington hospital, and particularly the community, for coming forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —with their advice, with some very innovative solutions and proposals as well. I'm confident that by working together—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —closely together, we'll have—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

GASOLINE TAX

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Earlier this year, your government once again

showed its disdain for rural Ontario by bringing in your cap-and-trade tax on everything, which is going to drive up the price of gasoline and motor fuels in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and all across rural Ontario.

The price of fuel, according to you, is going to go up about three cents a litre. If the Liberal record is the way the Liberal record always has been, it will probably be about eight.

You had a golden opportunity in your budget to at least share the gas tax rebate with all municipalities, like the federal government does. You chose not to, so as a result, I'm bringing back my gas tax fairness bill this afternoon.

I ask you, Deputy Premier: On behalf of your caucus, will you show some respect for rural Ontario and stand up and support it by voting for my gas tax fairness bill?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Less money for North Bay.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader is warned.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The members of the opposition are talking about taxes. It's astounding to me that they're now suggesting we should increase taxes or dedicate taxes or even have any taxes, Mr. Speaker.

The problem is, we want to make it a very dynamic and competitive business climate. The budget does not talk about—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Charles, you'd better get some better notes. The tax is there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Don't throw him under the bus.

Finish, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Speaker, what we already have is dedicated gas taxes to our municipalities to support infrastructure. We actually do support our municipalities and will be continuing to do so.

I will defer the supplementary to the Minister of Transportation, who can reinforce the excellent work that we're doing to support our municipalities—something that we've done as a result of the mistakes they made in downloading to municipalities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was there to meet the Premier when she came up to visit Wade and Anne Schroeder's farm to meet with farmers a couple of years ago. Neither one of us got there by the subway. There is only one way to get there, and that's by driving a vehicle.

She likes to grouse about how the feds don't do their job, don't pull their weight. Well, the federal government will put \$2.5 million of gas taxes into my riding this

year—\$2.5 million. Only those with a public transportation system get anything from you.

So I'll ask you one more time: Will you show respect for rural Ontario, like Stephen Harper and the federal government does, and support my private member's bill?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Order.

Minister of Finance?

Hon. Charles Sousa: To the very well-respected Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you one thing: This government won't shift problems to the grandchildren in Barry's Bay, Ontario.

Here's what we're doing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You never know. Finish, please.

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Hon. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A couple of initiatives in our budget: We'll be investing \$15 billion in rural infrastructure for the province of Ontario. We also made—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Huron–Bruce, come to order.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, we also instituted, on the advice of our rural municipal partners, \$100 million for small community infrastructure in the province of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Jeff Leal: —\$50 million of that will be allocated by a formula, which was the suggestion of our rural leaders from across the province of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

ONTARIO FILM INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is for the Acting Premier. This government talks a lot about making Ontario competitive in global markets, but in their budget they've cut the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit, which supports the Ontario film and television industry.

This budget will make BC more competitive than Ontario. Domestic and foreign producers in Ontario will suffer from the immediate implementation of these cuts, and they've warned they will make an immediate impact on jobs. They employ tens of thousands of skilled, experienced actors and crews, not to mention all the residual businesses—caterers, coffee shops and local shoots.

Why does this government want to take us from Hollywood North to Hollywood not?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I just want to start by saying our government is proud of our record when it comes to the creative cluster here in the province of Ontario. In comparison to the rest of the country, we have the most

generous tax credits for the creative cluster in Canada. When you compare us to Quebec and BC, we are the most competitive jurisdiction. In fact, we compete with New York and Los Angeles.

With the change in the Canadian dollar, we're well positioned to change our tax credit. The dollar being low, it gives us a competitive advantage. We have been building a sustainable tax credit here in the province of Ontario, and we continue to draw companies into Ontario to provide the type of support we want for the economy by creating jobs. We're quite proud of the record we have as a government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The Canadian Media Production Association says that it is the stability and availability of film incentives as well as Canada's talented crews that attract the producers. But what the government has done has changed the game for producers already filming here now. It jeopardizes current and future production and makes us an unreliable jurisdiction for them.

A producer in Hollywood knows what incentives there are in Ireland, Hungary, New York, LA and Vancouver and will go where it's competitive and predictable. Instead of X-Files and X-Men, the budget could leave us with ex-industry.

Will this government work with these valuable stakeholders to rectify this situation?

Hon. Michael Coteau: In our proposed 2015 budget, we are continuing to support the creative industries through—and I want the member to listen to this. The Ontario Music Fund now receives a permanent \$15 million per year. There's more than \$439 million in 2015-16 for cultural media tax credits that's going out, and \$6 million in 2015-16 and \$10 million a year starting in 2016-17 to the Ontario Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to working with the creative cluster here in Canada, Ontario remains the number one competitive jurisdiction and the most generous.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure. As we all know, investment in transportation infrastructure is very, very important for the health and strength of our communities. Last week, I was thrilled to be joined by my colleagues from Mississauga and Brampton when the Minister of Transportation made the fantastic announcement that our government would commit \$1.6 billion for the Hurontario-Main LRT. This is great news for the riding of Mississauga-Brampton South and Peel region.

However, having a federal partner when it comes to infrastructure funding is equally important. The federal government has released its 2015 budget. Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the minister: Is the federal infrastructure funding announced adequate for the province of Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm really happy that the member has asked this question, because I think it's important to put the federal commitment to infrastructure into perspective. Over the next two years, all they're increasing their infrastructure spend by is \$750 million, and that's across the entire country. This brings their infrastructure spending up to what sounds like a lot—\$81 billion—but that's over 10 years, and that's right across Canada.

By comparison, here in Ontario, this government is investing a record \$130 billion over the next 10 years in our roads, in our bridges, in transit and in other important infrastructure. What that means is, this Ontario government is investing three times more than the federal government in infrastructure in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I would conclude by saying there's no question that the federal government is abdicating their responsibility to help us build Ontario and Canada up through these investments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. I agree with you. While our government is making historic investments in the GTHA, the federal government has been absent.

Peel region is growing at an incredible rate. We need a federal partner when it comes to funding our growing infrastructure needs. That is why, this afternoon, I will be debating a motion calling on the federal government to provide long-term, reliable and stable infrastructure funding to build Ontario up.

For too long, the federal government has abdicated its responsibility. For too long, they have been giving tax credits to those who need it least, while the congestion in my community has gotten worse and worse.

My question, Mr. Speaker: Given the federal government's lack of infrastructure funding, Minister, can you tell Ontarians what our government is doing to build Ontario up?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to commend the member for her motion that she's bringing forward today, to make sure that the voice of Ontario is heard across this country, and to give all members of the Legislature a chance to stand up for Ontario in the efforts we're making to build Ontario up, because that's important: We need to stand up for Ontario.

Something that I think really drives all of us a little bit crazy in this province is when people stand up, the politicians stand up, and say they support infrastructure; they support transit; they support building roads and bridges across this province, but they say nothing about how they're going to fund it.

We're making the tough decisions to fund public transit, because we need to build Ontario up. We're creating 110,000 jobs across our province by doing that. If only we had a strong federal partner, like the member is suggesting, we could do even more.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. In February, my

colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and I asked you to visit the Chesley Restorative Care Unit that was scheduled to close on May 1. Since then, we've read hundreds of petitions into this House, and we've sent you multiple letters about this valuable program. Yet two months later, you haven't come to visit the site, to see the great work that is being done—you haven't.

Locally, the South Bruce Grey Health Centre board of directors has chosen to dig into reserves to extend this program to June 1.

Minister, will you commit today to keeping the Chesley Restorative Care Unit open, and ensure this outstanding program is available to residents in rural Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. I know the health centre at the Chesley site is extremely important to the community. That's why, when that first question was posed; when I became aware—when my ministry informed me of the specifics with regard to one unit, the restorative care unit at Chesley—that was a pilot project that began a number of years ago.

When we learned of the intention of the hospital to close that unit, I immediately engaged the LHIN, the local health integration network, to make sure that we provided the resources we needed to do. In fact, they stepped in and created a review process. Despite the fact that the hospital actually wanted to close this on May 1, we implored them to give the review, through the LHIN, an ample amount of time to actually look at the situation and review it properly.

The hospital has agreed, in fact, with the support that we're providing through the LHIN, to extend that period of time, to allow the review to continue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Please come and let the community show you the amazing work they're doing, because, quite frankly, your government's blatant disregard for front-line health care in rural Ontario has to come to an end. Hospitals are in disrepair. Services are being cut. Front-line health care workers are being fired—68 RPNs in the riding of Nipissing alone.

And what did you announce last week in the budget? Sadly, it wasn't more investment in front-line health care, Minister. It was another bureaucratic layer of 69 community health links. Seriously, Minister, we need help in rural Ontario.

My colleague Christine Elliott, the Whitby–Oshawa MPP—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Education, come to order.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: —recently visited the Kincardine hospital, and she was appalled to see the condition your government has allowed the Kincardine hospital to deteriorate to over the last 10 years.

Minister, will you commit today to coming and visiting both Chesley and Kincardine hospitals and ensure that rural Ontario's front-line health care is the best it can be?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm astounded—well, just like she invited me to visit Chesley, I would invite her to visit any one of the 69 health links that already exist in the province, that if she was to visit those and understand the important work they're doing—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron–Bruce will come to order; you asked the question.

Carry on.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —so she would understand the important work that health links are doing to support the 5% of the Ontario population—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I find that a challenge to me, so you're warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would ask her to visit any one of the health links across this province. She may want to go near Leamington because she can visit the Leamington hospital—as I was just talking about—and ask them about the process that I put under way with the local LHIN, as I did with Chesley, to ensure that the right decision is made and that it's a decision that supports the local community and that it's a decision that is driven by strong community support. I would ask her to start by informing—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Yesterday in this House, I asked if the Premier would tell us when it is that she's being interviewed by the anti-rackets squad. We find out this morning that, in fact, she did so yesterday.

So I'd like—and I think Ontarians would like—to have an answer to the following question: First of all, has the anti-rackets squad also gone in and talked to Mr. Thibeault? Have they gone and talked to Madam Sorbara and Mr. Lougheed? If they have, can you give us an indication of what was said?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can say is that the Premier has stated publicly that the OPP and her counsel mutually agreed upon a date for a meeting to be conducted before the end of April. I can confirm that that meeting has taken place.

The Premier answered openly. Her answers were consistent with the public statements that she's already made. The Premier has been very open with this Legislature, with the media and with the public about the allegations related to the Sudbury by-election. We are very pleased that Glenn Thibeault, the member from Sudbury, has joined our caucus, and is making a tremendous contribution already.

We will continue to co-operate fully with the police investigation, and we will let that investigation happen in the appropriate place.

DEFERRED VOTES

PROTECTING CHILD
PERFORMERS ACT, 2015LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES ENFANTS ARTISTES

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 17, An Act to protect child performers in the live entertainment industry and the recorded entertainment industry / Projet de loi 17, Loi visant à protéger les enfants artistes dans l'industrie du spectacle vivant et l'industrie du spectacle enregistré.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1143 to 1148.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All members take their seats, please.

On April 29, Mr. Miller from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek moved third reading of Bill 17. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gravelle, Michael	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Gretzky, Lisa	Miller, Norm
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Paul
Baker, Yvan	Harris, Michael	Munro, Julia
Balkissoon, Bas	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Natyshak, Taras
Barrett, Toby	Horwath, Andrea	Nicholls, Rick
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Orazietti, David
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Pettapiece, Randy
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Potts, Arthur
Clark, Steve	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadi, Shafiq
Colle, Mike	Jones, Sylvia	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Sattler, Peggy
Crack, Grant	Kwinter, Monte	Scott, Laurie
Damerla, Dipika	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sergio, Mario
Del Duca, Steven	Leal, Jeff	Singh, Jagmeet
Dhillon, Vic	MacCharles, Tracy	Smith, Todd
Dickson, Joe	MacLaren, Jack	Sousa, Charles
DiNovo, Cheri	MacLeod, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Dong, Han	Malhi, Harinder	Takhar, Harinder S.
Duguid, Brad	Mangat, Amrit	Thibeault, Glenn
Dunlop, Garfield	Mantha, Michael	Vanthof, John
Fedeli, Victor	Martins, Cristina	Vernile, Daiene
Fife, Catherine	Martow, Gila	Walker, Bill
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Matthews, Deborah	Wilson, Jim
Forster, Cindy	Mauro, Bill	Wong, Soo
Fraser, John	McDonnell, Jim	Yakabuski, John
French, Jennifer K.	McGarry, Kathryn	Yurek, Jeff
Gates, Wayne	McMahon, Eleanor	Zimmer, David
Gélinas, France	McMeekin, Ted	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 90; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

RYAN'S LAW (ENSURING
ASTHMA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS), 2015LOI RYAN DE 2015 POUR ASSURER
LA CRÉATION D'ÉCOLES
ATTENTIVES À L'ASTHME

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 20, An Act to protect pupils with asthma / Projet de loi 20, Loi protégeant les élèves asthmatiques.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1152 to 1153.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On April 29, Mr. Yurek moved third reading of Bill 20. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gravelle, Michael	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Gretzky, Lisa	Miller, Norm
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Paul
Baker, Yvan	Harris, Michael	Munro, Julia
Balkissoon, Bas	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Natyshak, Taras
Barrett, Toby	Horwath, Andrea	Nicholls, Rick
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Orazietti, David
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Pettapiece, Randy
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Potts, Arthur
Clark, Steve	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadi, Shafiq
Colle, Mike	Jones, Sylvia	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Sattler, Peggy
Crack, Grant	Kwinter, Monte	Scott, Laurie
Damerla, Dipika	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sergio, Mario
Del Duca, Steven	Leal, Jeff	Singh, Jagmeet
Dhillon, Vic	MacCharles, Tracy	Smith, Todd
Dickson, Joe	MacLaren, Jack	Sousa, Charles
DiNovo, Cheri	MacLeod, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Dong, Han	Malhi, Harinder	Takhar, Harinder S.
Duguid, Brad	Mangat, Amrit	Thibeault, Glenn
Dunlop, Garfield	Mantha, Michael	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Martow, Gila	Vernile, Daiene
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Matthews, Deborah	Walker, Bill
Forster, Cindy	Mauro, Bill	Wilson, Jim
Fraser, John	McDonnell, Jim	Wong, Soo
French, Jennifer K.	McGarry, Kathryn	Yakabuski, John
Gates, Wayne	McMahon, Eleanor	Yurek, Jeff
Gélinas, France	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 90; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE MOIS
DU PATRIMOINE HISPANIQUE

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 28, An Act to proclaim the month of October as Hispanic Heritage Month/ Projet de loi 28, Loi proclamant le mois d'octobre Mois du patrimoine hispanique.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ms. Martins has moved third reading of Bill 28. All those in favour, rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gravelle, Michael	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Gretzky, Lisa	Miller, Norm
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Paul
Baker, Yvan	Harris, Michael	Munro, Julia
Balkissoon, Bas	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Natyshak, Taras
Barrett, Toby	Horwath, Andrea	Nicholls, Rick
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Oraziotti, David
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Pettapiece, Randy
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Potts, Arthur
Clark, Steve	Jaczek, Helena	Qaadri, Shafiq
Colle, Mike	Jones, Sylvia	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Sattler, Peggy
Crack, Grant	Kwinter, Monte	Scott, Laurie
Damerla, Dipika	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sergio, Mario
Del Duca, Steven	Leal, Jeff	Singh, Jagmeet
Dhillon, Vic	MacCharles, Tracy	Smith, Todd
Dickson, Joe	MacLaren, Jack	Sousa, Charles
DiNovo, Cheri	MacLeod, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Dong, Han	Malhi, Harinder	Takhar, Harinder S.
Duguid, Brad	Mangat, Amrit	Thibeault, Glenn
Dunlop, Garfield	Mantha, Michael	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Marlow, Gila	Vernile, Daiene
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Matthews, Deborah	Walker, Bill
Forster, Cindy	Mauro, Bill	Wilson, Jim
Fraser, John	McDonnell, Jim	Wong, Soo
French, Jennifer K.	McGarry, Kathryn	Yakabuski, John
Gates, Wayne	McMahon, Eleanor	Yurek, Jeff
Gélinas, France	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 90; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On a point of order, the Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I would like to welcome a guest this morning, Laura Blair. She's the sister of my legislative assistant, visiting from Ottawa.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Windsor—Tecumseh on a point of order.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Point of order, Speaker: Famous Canadian actor Art Hindle came in late and missed the introduction earlier. We welcome Art.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1200 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests. Introduction of guests. Last call for introduction of guests. When I mean last call, I mean that I'm asking for the last call to introduce guests who are here so that we can introduce them, and once we do—oh. The member from Brampton—Springdale.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: It looks like my guests are not quite here yet, but I am expecting grade 5 students from my riding who will be visiting us from one of our French schools. Thank you. Oh. It looks like they're this way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): They made it. It's called ragging the puck, if anyone didn't know what that was.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yesterday's Auditor General's report confirms what drivers in my riding have known all along: that something was terribly wrong on our provincial highways. Each snowfall, I would hear complaints from residents in my riding of Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock. I brought their concerns to the attention of MTO officials time after time. However, we would never see any improvements.

Now, thanks to a request from my colleague the member from Leeds—Grenville and the work of the Auditor General, we now know the truth. For five years, the Liberal government knowingly lowered highway road maintenance standards and put motorists at risk.

The report is a scathing condemnation of this government's performance when it comes to protecting the safety of drivers. We now know the ministry approved contracts that led to fewer pieces of equipment on the road, fewer patrols to monitor dangerous conditions and less sand, salt and anti-icing liquid being applied.

Ensuring our roads are as safe as possible during the winter driving season is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the Ministry of Transportation. This is not just about poor service; it's about people's safety on our roads.

This winter, I worked with both Carillion and MTO officials in an effort to remedy the problems we're experiencing. However, it is the Ministry of Transportation that dictates the standards and the level of service.

These contracts fail to adequately maintain our provincial highways and need to be re-evaluated by the minister. The government knew about it five years ago but did nothing to address these risks, and people lost their lives as a result. I hope today he really means that he's going to correct the problem.

OPP HELICOPTER BASE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to share with you that the OPP detachment has had a helicopter stationed at Sudbury airport to assist in local search and rescue operations since 1991. I learned with surprise of a plan to move this helicopter out of Sudbury to Orillia, where it will sit beside the other OPP rescue helicopter.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot stress enough what a short-sighted decision this is. Orillia is a one-hour-and-20-minute flight away from Sudbury, and there is already an OPP search and rescue helicopter there.

To make matters worse, from November to March, the Orillia helicopter base is subjected to almost daily lake effects with snow, fog and rain limiting the flight opportunities, whereas the Sudbury helicopter base is exceptionally good for flying, with clear weather pretty much all year round.

The Sudbury base has been so successful that we were able to receive a new Eurocopter EC135 helicopter in 2011 to replace the old Twin Star helicopter that was quite dated.

Since the search and -rescue helicopter was stationed in Sudbury, aircraft and air crews have been responsible for saving hundreds of lives of northerners, responding to calls for service from a wide variety of policing agencies throughout northern Ontario, all the way to Thunder Bay.

Mr. Speaker, why does the government want to move these helicopters farther away from their target operational areas? I would say shame on the Liberals for refusing to consult us on this important decision.

MOSQUE IN OAKVILLE

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and speak about an event that took place in Halton over the weekend. This past Saturday in Oakville, a dream project for World Islamic Mission Canada took another step towards becoming a reality. Joined by hundreds of people, dignitaries and my friend the Minister of Labour, we celebrated the groundbreaking of a new state-of-the-art mosque, the Masjid-Noor-ul-haram.

Once completed, this breathtaking new building will become the largest Islamic centre in Ontario. It will give members of the local Islamic community a beautiful place to come and worship. And it will not only give Oakville a beautiful new addition to its community landscape, but it will enhance its already rich and vibrant culture.

The energy at the groundbreaking was electric. It was very clear what this meant not just to the Oakville community, but to all local Muslims who have been eagerly awaiting construction to get under way.

This breathtaking new mosque will not only be a building for Muslims to enjoy, but for all residents from Halton and all walks of life to come and experience together; a place to come together with family, friends and neighbours to celebrate the diversity that makes us strong and to educate one another about our differences in culture and religion.

Mr. Speaker, we are grateful for the community's contributions, and I look forward to seeing this new mosque built.

MINTO RURAL HEALTH CENTRE

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, on Tuesday, I was pleased to attend the groundbreaking ceremony for the Minto Rural Health Centre. This is a project that has been in the works for quite a while.

I want to recognize just a few of the community leaders who have championed this project. Thank you to the North Wellington Health Care team, including president and CEO Jerome Quenneville, and Tom Sullivan and the board of directors; the Waterloo Wellington LHIN, including director Dale Small; the town of Minto and Mayor George Bridge; Dr. Chris Cressey and the family health team; Luanne Ward and the Palmerston and District Hospital Foundation; and finally, David Craig and his team, whose leadership has made all the difference.

The Minto Rural Health Centre will be a main site for a number of community health partners and will provide space to primary care physicians.

This is truly a community project, with all the funding coming from the Palmerston and District Hospital Foundation, North Wellington Health Care and the town of Minto.

This project would not have been possible without the generous contributions from residents of Palmerston.

It may have taken some time, but I'm glad the government finally issued the approvals needed for this project to begin. We thank them for it.

Health care is so important to rural communities, and I know this facility will help to deliver the very best. That's why I want to continue doing everything I can to support this project, right up until its opening day and beyond.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. John Vanthof: After I was first elected in October 2011, that first winter we got all kinds of complaints about the roads. Being a new MPP, I went to the MTO and asked for a briefing from my local MTO, at which I was told, "Everything is fine. We're meeting our goals 95% of the time. Basically, your people are complaining for not really much reason."

I went back to the office, and my staff and I thought about how we were going to combat this, and we came up with the idea of organizing our own reporting system. So we created the northernroadreport.com, where we asked people to send specific times and pictures so we could go back to the MTO and show them.

Do you know what happened after that, Speaker? We got a letter from the Minister of Transportation telling us to take down the northernroadreport.com because we could be confusing people; they should talk to the MTO.

Well, now we find out that my people weren't wrong and the Northern Road Report did a lot of good; now we

find out from the Auditor General that my people were right. Instead of actually listening to the people—instead of the minister actually telling people to shut down their complaints, what this government should have been doing is looking at what people were saying, because in my riding, with road closures, accidents—and yes, people died in my riding from bad roads, and that has to stop. It has to stop now.

AGINCOURT COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise in the House today to recognize Agincourt Collegiate Institute, a high school in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, for their impressive 100 years of operation.

Recognized as the oldest high school in Scarborough, ACI has continued to be a leader in education, with a strong academic record, award-winning music and sports programs, and an engaged and inclusive student body.

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In 2012, two grade 12 students, Mathew Ho and Asad Muhammad, made international headlines. They successfully launched a homemade balloon and Lego man into our stratosphere.

ACI teachers Ashley Lintott, Karen Randall and Tammy Cooper and students formed the ACI gay-straight alliance seven years ago to promote a safe and inclusive learning environment. Recently, the Premier and I visited their school on the 2015 International Day of Pink, celebrating diversity and combatting bullying.

It is not a surprise that many ACI students have gone on to become leaders in their community, including famous actor Jim Carrey; Michael Overs, founder and CEO of Pizza Pizza; Ed Clark, former president and CEO of TD Bank Group; and Jean Kennedy Campbell, former public health nurse and recognized Scarborough matriarch.

Tomorrow, I'll be joining hundreds of students and alumni and the community in celebrating the achievements in education that ACI has made for the past 100 years.

MARKETING COMPETITION

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's my pleasure today to congratulate a constituent of mine, as well as my alma mater, on their success at the National Agri-Marketing Association competition.

Matthew Cardiff from Brussels was one of 10 University of Guelph students who headed to Kansas City, Missouri, earlier this month to participate in a marketing competition. His group's project, called StrawBabies, created a comprehensive marketing plan for this bite-sized strawberry. Matt explained that his team focused on three marketable traits for their strawberries: health—because strawberries, as you know, are packed with vitamins and antioxidants and are deemed a super-food; they're easy to eat in a hurry; and they have bite-sized convenience.

They placed fourth out of 28 teams from across North America in the people's choice division. This Gryphon team was voted "most favourite team" by the other 27 teams. I'm pleased to say that they also won an Outstanding Chapter Award.

The University of Guelph team was the only school from Ontario and one of only two schools from Canada.

I'm extremely proud of Matt and my fellow Gryphons for doing such a great job at this prestigious competition. Hearing of a successful program like this and the success that we have from the department of food, agricultural and resource economics at Guelph should remind us of the true importance of agri-food education and the amazing opportunities that it brings with it.

DEAFBLIND ONTARIO SERVICES

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I rise in the House this afternoon to speak about DeafBlind Ontario Services.

DeafBlind Ontario Services was at Queen's Park this past Wednesday, celebrating 25 years as an organization supporting individuals who are deaf-blind across this province through their residential and community services. I want to congratulate this incredible organization for the wonderful work they've done supporting people over the last 25 years. Today, DeafBlind Ontario Services cares for more than 60 individuals and operates 15 residences and three apartments in York region, Simcoe county, Middlesex-Oxford, Durham-Peterborough, Kitchener-Waterloo and Ottawa.

To think that this organization began in 1989 with a small group of dedicated parents who lobbied the government for community-based supported living programs for their children is simply an incredible testament to what a group of dedicated parents can achieve for their children. Today, we value community inclusion in supporting people with disabilities to become part of the everyday life of their community.

DBOS is a leader in the field of intervenor services, providing high-quality services with committed staff who serve some of the most complex cases in Ontario.

I wish to applaud their innovative approaches to delivering services. This is an organization that has done incredible work for some of the most challenged people in our community. They deserve our complete support and continued encouragement.

CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Mr. Speaker, today we have had the pleasure of being visited by the Canadian Cancer Society, as the month of April is recognized as Cancer Awareness Month in Canada. Throughout the month, volunteers are involved in numerous activities and fundraising campaigns to spread awareness of the fight against cancer. Supporters are seen wearing the symbolic yellow daffodils to pay tribute to those battling cancer and also those whom they may have lost to the tragic disease.

During the month of April, many of the supporters canvass neighbourhoods seeking donations for the Canadian Cancer Society. I had the pleasure of meeting one such individual who knocked on my door and who happens to be a resident of Brampton–Springdale. Mr. Narinder Singh, who is a cancer survivor, has made it his mission to spread awareness not only by canvassing to raise funds, but he also encourages others to be tested regularly, in the hope that those who do have cancer will catch it early and increase their survival rates.

Mr. Speaker, as we are now on the final day of the month of April, I would hope that we will all continue to spread awareness throughout the year. Cancer does not take a day off, and nor should we. It is a 24/7, 365-days-a-year battle. Unfortunately, we all know someone who is either currently fighting or has lost their life to cancer. It does not discriminate against age, sex or race; it actually affects all of us equally.

I would like to encourage all of those in this House and all Ontarians to continue to spread the word, to ensure that you and your loved ones continue to get regular checkups and stay one step ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Brampton–Springdale on a point of order.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I just wanted to correct my record for the introduction that I did earlier. I wanted to welcome Madame Morency and Madame Abi-Nader, and their classes from École élémentaire catholique Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Grant Crack: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Trevor Day): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 45, An Act to enhance public health by enacting the Healthy Menu Choices Act, 2015 and the Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2015 and by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act / *Projet de loi 45, Loi visant à améliorer la santé publique par l'édiction de la Loi de 2015 pour des choix santé dans les menus et de la Loi de 2015 sur les cigarettes électroniques et la modification de la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS SERVICES IN ONTARIO ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DES SERVICES DE SANTÉ MENTALE ET DE LUTTE CONTRE LES DÉPENDANCES EN ONTARIO

Ms. Armstrong moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 95, An Act to continue the Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council and to amend the Ombudsman Act in respect of providers of mental health and addictions services / *Projet de loi 95, Loi visant à proroger le Conseil consultatif pour le leadership en santé mentale et en lutte contre les dépendances et à modifier la Loi sur l'ombudsman à l'égard des fournisseurs de services de santé mentale et de lutte contre les dépendances.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This bill continues the Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council. The council's mandate, set out in section 3 of the bill, is to advise on and monitor the expeditious implementation of the recommendations made by the select committee of the Legislative Assembly on mental health and addictions in its report released in August 2010.

The council is required to submit a plan to the minister within one year with respect to matters related to mental health and addictions set out in subsections 3(2) and (3) of the bill. The council is also empowered to make recommendations to the government with respect to improving mental health and addictions services in Ontario.

The Ombudsman Act is amended to permit the Ombudsman to conduct investigations in respect of providers of mental health and addictions services in Ontario.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CANCER AWARENESS MONTH MOIS DE LA SENSIBILISATION AU CANCER

Hon. Dipika Damerla: As members will know, the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario division, is having its MPP education day here at Queen's Park. Some of their representatives are in fact here with us—well, they were supposed to be here—as we speak, and I rise to speak to the importance of what they're doing.

Earlier this morning, I was pleased to join their MPP breakfast, and I want to thank everyone who joined us for that breakfast.

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As it happens, today is also the last day of the Daffodil Month fundraising drive, which takes place every April. I would also like to take a moment to speak about that. I wear this daffodil with pride, knowing that money raised during this month funds life-saving cancer research and supports services that help Canadians avoid this terrible disease. Wearing this pin is also one way we show our support for Canadians living with cancer, and it helps raise awareness of cancer-related issues.

This is so important because the numbers around cancer incidence and cancer mortality are sobering. Every hour of every day, an average of 21 Canadians are diagnosed with cancer. Nine of them eventually die from the disease. Here in Ontario, we had nearly 74,000 new cancer cases last year, and more than 28,000 people died. This is the challenge that the people at the Canadian Cancer Society have taken on, and our government salutes them for that. We also fight alongside them.

Ontario is widely recognized as a leader in the battle against this disease. The Cancer System Quality Index, which tracks Ontario's progress on tackling cancer, continues to show that Ontarians receive some of the best cancer care in the world. We're also working very hard to reduce the number of people who contract the disease.

Our Making Healthier Choices Act, which is before this House, includes two pieces of legislation related to smoking, which, as we all know, is a major cause of cancer. It is fitting that it is today, April 30, the last day of Daffodil Month, that our bill, Bill 45, got referred for third reading. Tobacco use causes 13,000 deaths in this province every year. Our bill, if passed, would impose a ban on the sale of flavoured tobacco products, including menthol. This is in response to an emerging body of evidence that young people often become regular smokers when they start off with flavoured tobacco.

The second part of the legislation deals with electronic cigarettes. At this time, we do not know the health effects of electronic cigarette use or what, if any, relationship exists between electronic cigarette use and the uptake of tobacco smoking. But we don't want our kids being enticed to vape. Our bill, if passed, would ban the sale of electronic cigarettes to minors.

Tomorrow we will be marking the one-year anniversary of our government's tanning bed legislation coming into force. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has stated that tanning bed use increases the risk of the deadliest form of skin cancer, melanoma. That risk is 75% higher if tanning bed use begins before the age of 35.

We have heard the expression for years: Cancer can be beaten. We believe that, and we will continue fighting to make it a reality. We are very grateful to the Canadian Cancer Society, which has been leading this fight for so long. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Statements by ministries? Last call for statements by ministries. It is now time for responses.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus in recognition of the Canadian Cancer Society's daffodil campaign. We support this great national campaign that funds research and supports Canadians living with cancer. Today we ask all of us to take a moment to remember and reflect upon the people who have passed and all who are living with cancer and to support them in their courageous fight against this terrible disease.

I myself am wearing the daffodil pin to commemorate my sister Marjorie and my mom, Jean, who both passed away from cancer, as well as my sister Bonnie and my sister-in-law Joanne, who are cancer survivors. I'm wearing the daffodil pin to also honour my all-time hero, Terry Fox. To all of you who are on this difficult journey, we want you to know that you are not alone.

Just last month I was pleased to support Bill 61 to proclaim the second Sunday after Labour Day in each year as Terry Fox Day. Speaking to that bill gave this House an opportunity to honour this great Canadian hero and recognize the valuable work that the Canadian Cancer Society is doing every day to raise money for research.

I was also pleased to have had the opportunity to recognize how global this fight is, to acknowledge that people across the entire world, from the United Arab Emirates to China, are all taking action to raise awareness of prevention and early detection of cancer.

Today we have an opportunity to think about how we provide cancer care and supports here at home in Ontario. Just earlier today, I met and spoke with Canadian Cancer Society members and heard how we can strengthen cancer care for Ontario people and support the delivery of care for cancer patients.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that in my four years that I've had the honour and pleasure of serving in the deputy health critic role, I've had a number of meetings with health stakeholders. The cancer society are especially passionate advocates. When they speak, you listen—especially my local contact, Lera Ryan.

We know that there are things that we can do better. As cancer continues to claim the lives of 7.6 million people each year, four million of whom die prematurely, I think it is absolutely important that we do more. According to the Canadian Cancer Society, every three minutes cancer claims another Canadian. An estimated 186,000 new cases of cancer and 75,000 deaths from cancer will occur in Canada in a year. Prostate, lung, breast and colorectal cancer account for the top four newly diagnosed cancers.

Personally, I'm a strong promoter of wellness. I'm a runner, and I've always been a strong proponent of engaging people to lead healthier and more active lives. It's how I empower myself and how I fight back.

I also wanted to mention that our fight against cancer has had over 75 years of success. As a result, over 60% of Canadians diagnosed with cancer will survive at least five years after their diagnosis. This is a great accomplishment.

Again, a big welcome to the members of the Canadian Cancer Society, and a heartfelt and sincere thank you to all of the volunteers and all the staff for their incredible work. Thank you to all of you—to those listening, to those watching, those in the House—for wearing their daffodil to support the Canadian Cancer Society and for helping to bring the hope of Daffodil Day to full bloom: a day when no one will have to fear cancer.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was a pleasure for me to meet with close to a hundred volunteers from the Canadian Cancer Society when they hosted breakfast for us. I know many of the MPPs in this chamber took advantage of them being there. They are an amazing organization.

I agree with the previous speaker that when the cancer society does research, when they come to see you or any one of us, they are well prepared. We've talked a bit about some of the pieces of legislation that have gone through that support health promotion, and behind all of them the cancer society stood proudly. The volunteers from the cancer society also stood proudly.

It has been about a year since Ontario banned the use of tanning beds for youth, as well as regulated their use to make them safer. I cannot tell you, Speaker, how many thousands of youth got engaged with the Canadian Cancer Society to help us make that decision. It is through their work that it became a reality and that all of us voted in favour of passing this bill. The cancer society is able to reach across age groups, across geography, basically across our entire province and our country, and they do excellent work.

The same thing is true with Bill 45, a bill that just finished its second reading work and will hopefully come back for third reading soon. The first part of the bill has to do with calorie labelling. Calorie labelling is quite simple: When you go to McDonald's from now on you will see "Big Mac \$2.99, 450 calories." It's as easy as that. The number of calories will be right there on the menu board so you will be able to see. The Canadian society was there behind us with the research to show that if you give people information, if people eat healthy food, they decrease their risk of getting cancer.

The second part of the bill has to do with flavoured tobacco. This is an issue that the Canadian Cancer Society has been pushing for over seven years. You know very well, Speaker. You and I were there at a breakfast with the lung association and the cancer society telling us to ban flavoured cigarillos. You and I co-sponsored a bill that did just that, but the ink had not even dried on that bill before the tobacco industry had found a loophole, and they kept right on at it.

Right now the sale of flavoured tobacco is just exploding. It did better than even the tobacco industry would have hoped in hooking the next generation of smokers, making sure that our youth pick up smoking. They do this through flavoured tobacco. I'm really happy to say that the second part of Bill 45 will ban flavoured tobacco.

I'm still a little bit uncomfortable with one of the clauses in the bill, which would basically allow menthol to not be banned at the same time as every other flavour.

We are bringing this bill forward, we are banning flavoured tobacco in Ontario and it's time to ban all of them.

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I would say that we've also missed an opportunity to ban flavoured rolling cigarette paper because we all know that it won't take them long to put the flavouring inside the paper of the cigarettes, and then we're right back to where we were. Let's ban all flavours.

The last part of the bill has to do with regulating e-cigarettes.

I want to thank each and every one of you who gives their time, their effort, their energy to the Canadian Cancer Society. You are helping us make a healthier society, and we thank you for your dedication to this.

Ça me fait toujours plaisir de travailler avec la Société canadienne du cancer. Ils font tellement du bon travail. Lorsqu'ils viennent nous voir, ils viennent nous voir avec des documents qui ont une bonne recherche derrière eux et des arguments convaincants de comment on peut diminuer les risques de cancer et rendre notre société en meilleure santé.

Qu'on parle du projet de loi qu'on a fait par rapport aux lits de bronzage—ça fait un an maintenant que les jeunes n'ont pas le droit d'utiliser les lits de bronzage. Aussi, on parle du tabac aromatisé qui, on le sait, est une façon de s'assurer que les jeunes commencent à fumer et de s'assurer qu'on aura une autre génération de fumeurs. C'est la Société canadienne du cancer qui a mené la barque.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you to all of you.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup. I thank all members for their statements.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Whereas the billion-dollar gas plants cancellation, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020; and

"Whereas the Liberal government wasted \$2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

"Whereas the recent announcement to implement the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional \$137 per year starting in 2016; and

"Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and small businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

"Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario's power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity."

I support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Colton to take to the table.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Michael Mantha: This petition comes from the good people in Sault Ste. Marie and area.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Sault Area Hospital is facing major direct care cuts, including: the closure of acute care beds and cuts to more than 59,000 nursing and direct patient care hours per year from departments across the hospital, including the operating room, the intensive care unit, oncology, surgical, hemodialysis, infection control as well as patient care coordinators, personal support workers and others;

"Whereas Ontario's provincial government has cut hospital funding in real dollar terms for the last eight years in a row; and

"Whereas these cuts will risk higher medical accident rates as nursing and direct patient care hours are dramatically cut and will reduce levels of care all across our hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) Stop the proposed cuts to the Sault Area Hospital and protect the beds and services;

"(2) Improve overall hospital funding in Ontario with a plan to increase funding at least to the average of other provinces."

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and present it to page Luca to bring down to the Clerks' table.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and send it with Joshua.

PESTICIDES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario is proposing to make regulatory changes to the Pesticides Act that will have a considerable negative impact on virtually all of Ontario's corn and soybean farmers;

"Whereas comments on the proposed regulations need to be submitted by May 7, 2015; yet the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs plainly states on their website that '[t]he optimum planting date [for corn] is on or before May 7 in southwestern Ontario and May 10 in central and eastern Ontario. Delaying planting past the optimum date can result in yield reductions averaging about 1% per day of delay in May.';

"Whereas the ministry's website also says: 'The highest yields of soybeans are obtained from early plantings, generally the first 10 days of May. Later plantings are likely to incur significant reductions in yield ...';

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Instruct the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change to extend the comment period on EBR posting number 012-3733 beyond the planting season for corn and soybeans as defined by Agricorn planting deadlines to allow farmers to farm, and be properly consulted on these proposed regulations that will significantly impact their livelihoods."

I totally agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with Thomas.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Catherine Fife: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario does not have a strategy on Lyme disease; and

"Whereas the Public Health Agency of Canada is developing an Action Plan on Lyme Disease; and

"Whereas Toronto Public Health says that transmission of the disease requires the tick to be attached for 24 hours, so early intervention and diagnosis is of primary importance; and

"Whereas a motion was introduced to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario encouraging the government to adopt a strategy on Lyme disease, while taking into account the impact the disease has upon individuals and families in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to develop an integrated strategy on Lyme disease consistent with the action plan of the Public Health Agency of Canada, taking into account available treatments, accessibility issues and the efficacy of the currently available diagnostic mechanisms. In so doing, it should consult with representatives of the health care community and patients' groups within one year."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this petition to page Mira.

STUDENT SAFETY

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Luca.

TRESPASSING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas when private property is damaged it is left to property owners to repair these damages, and the costs can quickly add up to thousands of dollars. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has asked for a minimum fine for trespassing and an increase on the maximum limit on compensation for damages;

"Whereas Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, will amend the current Trespass to Property Act by creating a minimum fine of \$500 for trespassing and increasing the maximum compensation for damages to \$25,000; and

"Whereas the Respecting Private Property Act will allow property owners to be fairly compensated for destruction to their property, and will also send a message that trespassing is a serious issue by creating a minimum fine;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To support Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, and schedule public hearings so that Bill 36 can be passed without further delay."

For obvious reasons, I support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Abdullah to take to the table.

PRIX DE L'ESSENCE

M. Michael Mantha: Une pétition présentée par les gens du nord, de ma circonscription d'Algoma-Manitoulin :

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Alors que les automobilistes du nord de l'Ontario continuent d'être soumis à des fluctuations marquées dans le prix de l'essence; et

« Alors que la province pourrait éliminer les prix abusifs et opportunistes et offrir des prix justes, stables et prévisibles; et

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« Alors que cinq provinces et de nombreux états américains ont déjà une réglementation des prix d'essence; et

« Considérant que les juridictions qui réglementent le prix de l'essence ont : moins de fluctuations des prix, moins d'écarts de prix entre les communautés urbaines et rurales et des prix d'essence annualisés inférieurs.

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« D'accorder à la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario le mandat de surveiller le prix de l'essence partout en Ontario afin de réduire la volatilité des prix et les différences de prix régionales, tout en encourageant la concurrence. »

Je suis totalement d'accord avec cette pétition et je la présente à page Madison pour l'apporter à la table.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas current federal laws are not a strong enough deterrent to stop criminals from driving around with unlawful handguns in their cars;

"Whereas in recent years there have been a number of innocent people shot and killed by unlawful handguns carried in cars despite the hard work of our local police;

"Whereas unlawful handguns in cars, drive-by shootings, and gun crimes are threatening innocent citizens and our police officers on duty;

"Whereas the constant flow of illegal smuggled guns into the hands of street criminals continues;

"Whereas only police officers, military personnel, and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess handguns;

"Whereas Bill 24 would help police take these gunmen off our streets and make our communities safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 24 MPP Mike Colle's PMB entitled Prohibiting Driving with Unlawful Handguns Act, 2014, into law so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving unlawful handguns and drive-by shootings in our communities."

I agree with this, affix my signature and give it to Mira to bring forward.

HYDRO RATES

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to lower hydro rates.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Whereas the billion-dollar gas plants cancellation, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020; and

"Whereas the Liberal government wasted \$2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

"Whereas the recent announcement to implement the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional \$137 per year starting in 2016; and

"Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and small businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

"Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario's power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity."

I will sign my name to support this petition and give it to page Olivia.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mr. Michael Mantha: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease that causes thinking and memory impairment. Alzheimer's disease is progressive, worsens over time and will eventually lead to death;

"Whereas there are an estimated 208,000 Ontarians diagnosed with Alzheimer's and related dementia today, and that number is set to increase by 40% in the next 10 years;

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease creates emotional, social and economic burdens on the family and supports of those suffering with the disease—over 25% of those providing personal supports to survivors of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia are seniors;

"Whereas the total economic burden of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than \$770 million per year through to 2020; and

"Whereas Ontario's strategy for Alzheimer's disease and related dementia has not been revised since the implementation of a five-year strategy in 1999;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to immediately review, revise and implement an updated, research-informed comprehensive strategy to respond to and prepare for the rapidly growing

needs of those living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia."

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition, and present it to page Ethan to bring down to the Clerks' table.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have another petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees; and

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature, and give it to Jae Min.

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"In light of the many wide-ranging concerns being raised by Ontario citizens and 80-plus action groups across Ontario and the irrefutable international evidence of a flawed technology, health concerns, environmental effects, bird and bat kills, property losses, the tearing apart of families, friends and communities, and unprecedented costs;

"We, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to declare an Ontario-wide moratorium on the development of wind farms."

I totally agree with this petition as well, Speaker, I'll affix my signature and I'll send it to the table with Cailyn.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I move that, in the opinion of this House, since the 2015 federal budget commits only \$750 million Canada-wide to new transit spending in a fund that does not start until 2017-18 and commits no new money for other infrastructure, the Ontario Legislature calls on the federal government to immediately reverse course by providing significant

long-term, reliable, stable infrastructure funding to build Ontario up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for a presentation.

The member from Mississauga–Brampton South.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It's a pleasure to rise today and ask for consideration of my motion by the members of this House, a motion that is meant to provoke a serious conversation about the role of the federal government in supporting vital infrastructure projects in Ontario and throughout the provinces of our Confederation.

I'm proud to be a member of a government that values investment in its people through essential projects that impact all of our well-being: hospitals, schools, colleges, universities and the roads, bridges, highways—and, increasingly, the public transit—that connect our homes, workplaces and places of worship to our communities and to each other. These are projects that, as our population grows, are important to the health and strength of the communities of Mississauga–Brampton South and Ontario. In fact, in our increasingly urban and competitive world, they help to define our economic success.

In the 1800s, roads cut by government workers through Ontario's woodlands opened up regions to prosperous futures. Canal systems, financed by government, allowed freight and manufactured goods to be shipped to markets using waterways such as the St. Lawrence River, the historic equivalent to our modern highways or rail systems. Today, proper transit can make the difference between business thriving or withering, and residents enjoying their community or scorning it.

If our communities are to be strong and attract new people, culture, business and private investment, they need to be made accessible and have well-funded infrastructure.

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That is why I was so pleased to join the Minister of Transportation, the mayors of Mississauga and Brampton, and my colleagues from Mississauga and Brampton last week to announce a game-changing project, the Hurontario–Main LRT, that will run through my great riding of Mississauga–Brampton South. I'm very pleased with the commitment of our government. They have committed a \$1.6-billion investment. Running roughly 23 kilometres, including 13 stops in my own riding, it will connect my constituents using an efficient, environmentally sound light rail system; a system that will connect residents with other municipal and regional transit systems, unlocking the province for them.

It is a project that, frankly speaking, would not be possible without the leadership of Ontario's Premier, and is all the more critical due to the lack of a federal partner. Like many Ontarians, and in fact many Canadians, I was disappointed, even shocked, to learn that the recently announced federal budget allocated very limited funding for infrastructure projects across Canada. In fact, a meagre \$750 million is being allocated over two years for transit projects in all the towns, cities and provinces in

Canada. It is a joke; it's laughable, Mr. Speaker—funding that will not even be in place until 2017-18.

To quote an article in the Toronto Star on April 23, "Even when fully up to speed this Canada-wide initiative won't cover the cost of building just one planned light rail line serving Mississauga and Brampton." In the simplest terms, this amount breaks down each year to just about \$37,500,000 for each province in Canada, or about \$10.40 for each Canadian.

What is lacking from Ottawa is not only funding for worthy projects that serve Canadians; what is lacking is long-term, reliable and stable infrastructure investment that municipalities rely upon for their health and future planning. Infrastructure projects are not the partisan projects that some political projects are, but they are essential to the health of our communities and our economy. Neglecting infrastructure puts Ontario and Canada at a serious disadvantage in our highly competitive world.

To be sure, the roles of the federal and provincial governments have changed over the decades. A 2013 report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives indicates that in 1955 the federal government owned 44% of public infrastructure, the provinces owned 34% and local governments owned 22%. Ontario's finance minister said, as he tabled our budget, that the provinces, territories and municipalities contribute roughly 86% to infrastructure funding. According to a report entitled *Crisis and Opportunity: Time for a National Infrastructure Plan* for Canada, published in 2014, provincial, territorial and municipal governments were responsible for as much as 95% of public infrastructure in the country. This means, in the words of the finance minister, that the federal government has not only missed the transit train, but it is not even in the station.

Our recovery from the global recession has not stopped Ontario from investing in infrastructure under this government. On the contrary, we are making historic investments in projects like the Hurontario LRT, Mississauga rapid transit, increased GO train service and the Union Pearson Express, all projects under way in my region.

We are funding other useful infrastructure projects such as the Erinoak campus, the Brampton courthouse, the redevelopment of Peel Memorial hospital, and the expansion of Sheridan College in Mississauga.

In fact, since 2003 our province alone has invested over \$100 billion in public infrastructure, and we have a plan to do far more. Our government has committed to investing more than \$130 billion for transit and other infrastructure over 10 years, which will benefit the national economy. That is \$31 billion in infrastructure projects throughout Ontario—roughly \$15 billion for urban communities and another \$15 billion for rural ones. Consider that, Mr. Speaker: so much more than the federal government, which has far greater power to raise money for major infrastructure projects, projects that build Ontario's infrastructure up and which, during our recovery, sustain and create hundreds of thousands of jobs locally and regionally.

Municipalities, our other partners, are calling for long-term, reliable, stable infrastructure funding for their highways, transit, schools and hospitals. Communities which have been designated as growth centres, such as Mississauga, will see changes in the years to come.

There is, however, a limit to the amount of vehicle traffic that any road system can handle, as we know from our urban highways. Instead, we must look to a future that is already being heralded around the world; one where public transit, buses, streetcars, light rail and subways are essential to allowing people to move about efficiently, reliably and safely. The role of the federal government is to help build our nation, to share in investments that makes us greater. When Ontarians pay \$11 billion more to the federal government than they receive back in federal transfer programs and services, they know that a fiscal imbalance exists.

According to an article put out by the Mowat Centre at the School of Public Policy in June 2014, Ontario and its 13 million residents receive the same funding from the federal government for infrastructure as Canada's smallest province, Prince Edward Island, which has only 150,000 residents.

In regard to the provincial budget, Janet Ecker, former Ontario finance minister and president and CEO of the Toronto Financial Services Alliance, said, "This continued commitment" by Ontario "to invest in infrastructure positively impacts Toronto's increasing success as a growing international finance centre."

According to the Toronto Region Board of Trade, "Every dollar invested in transportation infrastructure increases real GDP by \$1.19."

A mayor had this to say about the federal budget—the mayor of Saskatoon, Don Atchison. He said, "It's a race to the funding."

"If you look at Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Kitchener-Waterloo ... those are all areas that we're going to have to compete with."

Having said that, I ask my colleagues to call on the federal government to do its share for the well-being of the people of Ontario, our common and shared constituents, and to provide significant, long-term, stable, reliable infrastructure funding to the province of Ontario to build it up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak on this today. I think the intent of this motion is good. Across this country, we have growing centres of economic activity. We have young people, dedicated and talented people, willing to work. They're also part of communities, both new and old, that require investments to be able to thrive. Looking around this province, it's clear where that investment can be used—in the areas of infrastructure and transportation.

1400

As many of you know, the NDP has called for the federal government to increase federal funding for transit for a number of years. This motion speaks to the fact that the federal Conservatives have put the desire to present a

balanced budget ahead of providing for the people of this country. Yes, being fiscally responsible is important, but looking at the federal budget, it seems that this budget was balanced more on cuts and asset sales than on fiscal responsibility.

A national transit strategy has nothing to do with just making money available. It's all about making sure that the money is spent wisely and is focused on long-term planning and growth. The problem is, it seems that with a number of these budgets, it's far more about political gain.

Let's take a look at what the Conservative government has put in their budget around transit. The amount they are providing for funding across this country for the 2015-16 year: zero dollars. We don't start to see money until 2017-18, and finally, the bulk of the funding comes in 2019-20. You can see what they've done here. They want to claim they're balancing the budget, and they want to claim that they're reinvesting in the country, so they do this down-the-road kind of investment.

I believe that's what the member opposite is also concerned about: that Ontario won't be receiving any infrastructure or transportation funds for years. Once it does come, it's not nearly enough to help this province invest in what it needs to.

We have incredible potential in this province, and we need the support of both the federal and provincial governments to realize it. So, yes, as members of the provincial Legislature, of course we'd like to see more out of the federal budget. In fact, we need to see more.

The motion before us sounds good, and it certainly is something we agree with. But there's a major concern here that I think needs to be talked about. The tactic that the federal Conservatives are using looks a lot like what the Liberal government has been doing here in Ontario.

The Conservative budget is all about big announcements and deferred spending. It makes promises to the people of Canada without the Conservatives ever knowing if they'll be fulfilled. Well, this is exactly the same thing that we're seeing here at the provincial level around transit spending.

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It would help if my colleagues would please listen.

Let me just use a few examples—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Let me use a few examples. The 2015 budget announced a new Connecting Link Program to replace the one that this government cancelled in 2012, but money won't begin flowing until 2017-18.

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It won't be flowing until 2017-18.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: 2016—check your numbers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister of Transportation, come to order.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Earlier this year, the government announced that it would defer construction of the

Toronto Sheppard East LRT until at least 2025, despite the fact—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): If it continues, I'll name people. It's getting out of hand. Your member had the luxury of speaking without interruption.

Continue.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It's probably important that they do listen.

This government would defer the Sheppard LRT until at least 2025, despite the fact that the funding for this project was confirmed in 2009.

This government promised \$1 billion for the Ring of Fire infrastructure, but this budget revealed that money won't be seen until 2018-19.

The 15-minute all-day GO service to communities like Kitchener, Guelph and Brampton—which, by the way, was promised in the last election—won't be seen for at least another 10 years.

The government promised electrified trains on the Union Pearson Express by 2017. Now we know it will be deferred a lot longer.

The examples go on and on. The people of this province are promised one thing and then given another.

Do we believe the federal Conservatives need to invest more in this province? Absolutely. Do we believe they're kicking in their fair share of infrastructure and transportation money? Not a chance. But this motion attacks a federal budget that will not see any funding given to this province until 2017-18. It's right there in the wording; this is the focus of the motion. Yet this government has a long history of doing exactly the same thing. Both say one thing, "We need to get elected," and do another once they're actually in office. This province—

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to talk about that, and I'm glad you raised it because I've only got 30 seconds left.

This province desperately needs transportation and infrastructure support. Look at my riding in Niagara. We have lost millions of dollars of business because of the horrible transportation problems on the QEW. This could be solved tomorrow by this government following through on its priorities and bringing daily two-way GO train service from Toronto to Niagara. We've given you an incredible business case. We've shown the community support and the unified support of Niagara.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate. The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to stand in my place this afternoon and speak strongly in support of this motion that's being brought forward by our colleague from Mississauga-Brampton South. I want to begin by saying how grateful I am to that member from Mississauga-Brampton South for having the courage to bring this forward. She represents a community, like many of us do on this side of the House, that is desperately in need of the infrastructure investments that our government is

making thanks to the leadership of our Premier, Kathleen Wynne. To the member from Mississauga-Brampton South, I want to say thank you.

I will spend a couple of minutes, just in a moment, talking more about the motion itself with respect to the federal budget. But I want to take a quick second to acknowledge the immediately previous speaker from Niagara region, the member from the NDP caucus. It's unfortunate that time and time again in this House, members from the third party, from the NDP, consistently attempt to call us as a government on to the carpet for not investing enough in communities including those they represent. When they, in fact, had the opportunity last year, on May 1 and then again in June, when we came back after our consultation with the people, twice they voted or said they would oppose a budget that will help communities like Niagara region, like the north, like Kitchener-Waterloo, like Hamilton, like Peel, like Toronto, like all the communities across this province. It takes a certain degree of gall coming from that member and that party that they would deprive their own communities of support and then say they wouldn't support our budget.

To the Conservative members in this House, I sincerely hope, as we've said many times, that they will reach out to their federal cousins, to those people with whom they share a political philosophy, to encourage them to do what's right for the people of Ontario.

Thanks to Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Liberal government, we are investing over \$130 billion over the next 10 years in crucial infrastructure right across the province of Ontario.

Just in the last few days, I've had the privilege of announcing that we are proceeding with the \$1.6-billion Hurontario-Main LRT for the residents of Peel region; the \$1.2-billion Finch LRT for the people of north-western Toronto—Etobicoke and North York; and the \$13.5-billion GO regional express rail plan over 10 years, which will literally transform the GO train network across all of the greater Toronto and Hamilton area into a consistent rapid train network for people across all of these fast-growing communities.

I was in Sault Ste. Marie with the member from Sault Ste. Marie, who is the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, and the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, not that many days ago to specifically announce that we are re-establishing a Connecting Links fund, as was asked for by our community partners, our municipal partners. Consistently at AMO and ROMA gatherings, they specifically asked for us to reinstate that plan, that program, and we've done it. And contrary to what the member from Niagara said, Speaker, Connecting Links funding will begin flowing in 2016, not 2017. I'd encourage that member to do better research before he speaks in this House.

Fundamentally, for the people of Ontario, for the people representing communities in every corner, outside the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, and northern and rural communities, and of course here in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, the question that needs to be

posed to the federal Conservative government is, why does that government feel so inclined, why does that government feel so strongly—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Why don't they put you in jail for causing those deaths?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. The member for Ottawa—Orléans, I'd ask you to withdraw that statement.

Interjection.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Nepean—Carleton.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Nepean—Carleton—and I'll ask you to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): And I'll ask all sides to come to order, as I've warned the other side.

Continue.

1410

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As I was saying, the question for the federal Conservative government—and actually, beyond that, the question for Conservatives in this Legislature—is why do they feel so strongly that they need to support a federal government that's determined to turn its back on communities like Peel region, Kitchener, Hamilton, Niagara, the north, Algoma—Manitoulin, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and so many others?

Why would they go forward? Why would they go forward with an investment plan for infrastructure that is so meek in comparison to the totality of the challenge that we face here in this region and across the province of Ontario? I don't know why. I don't have a clear answer as to why.

What I know, representing a community on the edge of Toronto and the 905; what I know when I travel to the north, when I'm in the southwest; what I know when I stand in this House earlier today; when I'm here, and I hear the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke talk about the need to invest more in rural communities, for example, as it relates to transportation infrastructure—I can't understand why that member wouldn't pick up the phone and call his federal counterpart and say, "Where in this \$1-billion plan will you be helping the people of rural Ontario?"

It's perfectly legitimate, when it comes to political discourse, even when we all represent the same party theoretically—it's perfectly legitimate for the member from Nepean—Carleton to pick up the phone and say, "Where will you be with phase 2 of the Ottawa LRT? Where will you be to match the province's support for the 400-series highways, the hundreds of millions of dollars that we've invested in Ottawa since 2003 and will continue?" It's perfectly legitimate for all of those members to pick up their phones, to reach out.

I'm sure the Conservative Party, like other parties, has plenty of opportunities to have those conversations between federal and provincial partners, to pick up your phones, send an email, send a telegram, send a homing pigeon. Ask the federal government why they won't

stand up for Ontario the way this Premier is, the way our government is.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. Point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I just want a clarification from the minister if it was his ministry that made the big debacle on the 400-series—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That's not a point of order.

Further debate?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm really pleased to be able to stand and rise in support of this motion. First of all, I'd like to congratulate the member for Mississauga—Brampton South for bringing this forward, for her leadership and initiative, and for raising an issue that needs as much attention as we can possibly get, until the right thing is done.

Speaker, I've told this story before in the Legislature, and I'll share it again. When I first got elected, I received a lot of advice this past June and July. One of the pieces of advice I got was from somebody in the community who said, "You know, don't forget that you not only are elected to serve the people of Ontario today and their interests in the short term, but you also need to think about tomorrow, and you need to think about their interests over the long term." To me, that's what this motion is all about. It's really about saying we need to invest, to ensure our prosperity not only in the short term and medium term but over the long term.

We live in the best country in the world, in my view. One of the reasons we live in such a great country is because of our heritage, because of the tradition of governments, leadership, people across Canada making the right investments, thinking over the long term about what's needed to preserve this great country and to build this great country up.

The classic example is, of course, the railroad, which was built across this country. This took vision; this took initiative. It took people saying, "There's a vision for this country that we have—a unified country, a strong country, an example for the world—but to do this, we need to make investments in infrastructure." The railroad is a great example of that.

When my grandfather first immigrated to this country, one of his first jobs was building infrastructure across Ontario, to help build it up. His generation made sacrifices to ensure that our generation would enjoy the prosperity that we have today. It's our generation's job to make those same investments so that future generations enjoy that as well.

These investments are critical—

Interjections.

Mr. Yvan Baker: —and I gather from the heckling on the other side—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Algoma—Manitoulin, come to order. The Minister of Tourism and Culture, come to order.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I will say that these investments are critical. They're critical to our economy and to our future prosperity, and they're critical to our quality of life.

The member who introduced the motion did a wonderful job of outlining why this is important. She outlined how significant the investment is that our government, under the leadership of Premier Kathleen Wynne, is making in infrastructure across transportation, across energy, across schools, across hospitals—the things that are going to secure our services and prosperity for the future. I won't go any more into that.

But the federal government is investing meagrely in infrastructure—very, very little: no money over the next two years, \$750 million after that. When you think about how little that is in the context of how vast our country is, it is really sad, Mr. Speaker. Add to that the fact that Ontarians are sending \$11 billion more than they're getting back. The federal government has balanced the budget on the backs of Ontarians.

I would call on all members to stand up for Ontario and do the right thing. The federal government needs to make those investments to secure our future and continue that tradition of looking to the long term.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to weigh in on this private member's bill. I know the member from Mississauga-Brampton South. I have great respect for her. I think that she serves her community very well, and I think she brings this motion to this House with great earnestness.

It is true that the 2015-16 federal budget, which was just issued last Tuesday, announced a new national transit fund. The amount of the promised transit funding through the fund for 2015-16 is zero; \$375 million per year will start flowing in 2018, and \$1 billion will flow in 2019-20. It is completely back-loaded. It's purely politics at play on transit.

I guess I have to challenge the motion, though, based on the record that we've seen from the Liberal government. I think that's our concern: that the Liberals are challenging the federal Conservative Party to fund transit in an open and transparent way, when the Liberals have not been transparent or open about transit funding in the province of Ontario for quite some time. In fact, it is the new pattern, and I suspect that's why we garnered that response.

I'm going to remind the people of this province of the announcement just this week. There is some serious backpedalling on transit, and there's a lot at stake in the province of Ontario.

Just three days ago, the government deferred the Sheppard East LRT project, which has been formally funded since 2009. The minister, who just had some words to say to me, said that there was not enough capacity—crews and workers—available to handle two LRT construction jobs at once. Imagine that. This government is so busy selling off Hydro One that you haven't focused on the work actually at hand.

If \$250-million-per-year worth of long-planned LRT construction can no longer be accommodated at the same time as another long-planned LRT project that will cost \$300 million per year over four years, then how does the government expect to accelerate transportation infrastructure construction in this province by over \$3 billion every year for 10 years, above existing plans? For the next year, at least, it doesn't, and that's the truth of the matter, Mr. Speaker.

Most of the infrastructure spending announced in the 2015 budget, Building Ontario Up—the counter-title is Tearing Ontario Down—is deferred by a year or more. The numbers in that budget do not lie.

The Minister of Transportation can stand up and say, “We are aggressive in accelerating transportation.” They are actively moving backwards on the transportation infrastructure file, all the while saying, “\$130 billion.”

This is another key piece that I want to get in Hansard. The 2015 budget revealed that the government saved \$1.5 billion in 2014-15, by deferring infrastructure spending under the Building Canada Fund, which was celebrated last month as faster-than-expected deficit reduction. This government is bragging about not completing infrastructure projects that have been on the books for five to 10 years.

It is embarrassing that this government stands in this House every day and is willing to gamble the entire future of this province. The economic reality in this province is that for 13 years, they have been promising—the only thing that this government is good at is breaking promises on transit, Mr. Speaker.

1420

Of great interest, actually, for the people in my riding, in Kitchener-Waterloo, is that there have been—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, come to order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —promises. It's astounding: The politicians, the candidates, the Premier, the Minister of Transportation—they have come to Kitchener-Waterloo, they have all stood on that rail platform, and they have made promises that honestly would make your head spin. Really, they have. They have said “two-way, all-day,” they have said “every 15 minutes,” they have said “electrified,” and you stood there and you said the same thing.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You know what? I don't blame you for being mad. I don't blame you for being mad, because you ran on it, and you broke that promise to my community.

Kitchener-Waterloo is an economic engine in this province. The two-way part—which this government never got and they probably never will—is that 10,000 people try to get into Kitchener-Waterloo every single day. That's would be the two-way part. Peak service, peak time—you cannot backpedal any faster on a transit promise from this government. You know what? Our community has had it. They see right through you—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: How did you vote on that budget?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. The Minister of Transportation, you're warned. The deputy House leader, you're warned.

Continue.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So the budget—you know, they can say whatever they want, and they can spin it. They're going to change the advertising rules in this province. They're going to use taxpayer money to spin the people of this province. It is unconscionable, in the province of Ontario—but the budget doesn't lie; the numbers aren't there to fund those promises. You broke so many promises on transit. You should literally be ashamed of yourselves.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you—to my one colleague that's left here—for the opportunity to speak to a motion that is actually little more than another thinly veiled, pre-election attempt to take shots at the federal Conservatives in order to sway voters in the GTA.

The few hours that this Legislature actually devotes to private members' business every Thursday is the one legislative opportunity for members—especially those backbenchers without portfolios—to stand up on behalf of their constituents and residents, and address key issues directly impacting their lives and those in their area.

I would like to say, off the top, what a shame it is that a provincial Liberal backbencher would have to use the one opportunity she has to work on legislation to address important issues in her community to instead engage in partisan attacks against the federal government to prop-up Mr. Trudeau's chances in the GTA. Frankly, it's a missed opportunity for her community members, and I question the continued and obvious attempts to point fingers at the feds when there's so much to be addressed here in the province of Ontario and—I'm sure—in her riding of Mississauga-Brampton South.

That said, Speaker, as we've heard from the member for Mississauga-Brampton South, this first part of this motion suggests that “the 2015 federal budget commits only \$750 million Canada-wide to new transit spending in a fund that does not start until 2017-18.”

I would like to, first, take a closer look at that particular statement. The truth is that, while the budget does call for \$750 million for new transit spending in 2017-18, the Public Transit Fund will actually provide \$750 million over two years and then \$1 billion annually thereafter for new public transit infrastructure in Canada's large cities. Further—and the member should know this—the federal government is actually directly funding new public transit infrastructure in her riding already.

Brampton's Züm, a bus rapid transit system once known as AcceleRide, is an essential piece of her area's transportation plans going forward and, yes, Speaker, it is funded in part by the same federal government she is calling out for lack of funding.

In fact, the first phase of AcceleRide was funded by the Harper government in Ottawa to the tune of \$53 million. Furthermore, phase 2 of the project is receiving another—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the member for Barrie come to order?

Mr. Michael Harris: —\$42 million. By my calculations, that's close to \$100 million right there being injected into the member's community for transit. That's not chicken feed. I think, given the motion being debated today, that deserves to be recognized.

Now with the second part of the motion: The member's motion calls for the federal government to provide “significant long-term, reliable, stable infrastructure funding to build Ontario up.” Here again, I wonder if the member has only been reading the Trudeau Liberal talking points for her direction, as the fact is, Ottawa is already providing significant long-term, reliable, stable infrastructure funding to build Ontario up.

The very same budget the member for Mississauga-Brampton South is criticizing for lack of funding also saw the government reaffirm its infrastructure commitments outlined in the 2013 budget known as the New Building Canada Plan. The New Building Canada Plan will see the government of Canada invest over \$53 billion in infrastructure across the country over the next 10 years.

Here in Ontario, this represents almost \$11 billion in dedicated federal funding, including more than \$2.7 billion under the New Building Canada Fund and an estimated \$8.12 billion under the federal Gas Tax Fund. Again, in the member's riding itself, the federal Gas Tax Fund alone has meant \$91.7 million for the city of Brampton from 2006 to 2014. Going forward, from 2015 to 2018, the city of Brampton will receive \$63.7 million from the fund.

It doesn't stop there. Through the federal government, Ontario also stands to benefit from \$4 billion available for projects of national significance, \$1.25 billion in additional funding available for P3 projects and \$10.4 billion via the GST rebate, which provides municipalities across the country with additional resources to address their infrastructure priorities.

It seems to me that the only thing standing in the way of Ontario building itself up, as the motion notes, is the Wynne Liberals' legacy of economic mismanagement that has diverted funding away from the very infrastructure investments this motion speaks to.

Just imagine what we could do if Ontario didn't have to spend \$12 billion a year just to pay down interest on the debt, after a decade plus of McGuinty-Wynne government economic mismanagement. There would certainly be a lot more to spend on needed infrastructure if this government spent more time on reducing its debt load than crying poor to Ottawa.

With all of these billions of dollars in dedicated federal funding coming to Ontario, it is up to the Wynne Liberals to get their fiscal house in order to ensure the

province is doing its part instead of pointing fingers at Ottawa with one hand and grasping for federal handouts with the other.

But it's always the same with this regime: redirecting the blame to cover over the fact that their spending addiction has created a sad situation where this once strong province doesn't have enough left at the end of the day to spend on all the priorities that we share. All the while, Ottawa continues to do its part even as they shoulder the blame accusations fired off daily by this Liberal government.

In fact, since 2006, federal investments of over \$4.91 billion under the Building Canada Fund, the Provincial-Territorial Base Fund, the Green Infrastructure Fund and the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund have assisted the government of Ontario and its municipalities to make infrastructure improvements for the benefit of all Ontarians.

Municipalities have benefited from the approximately \$4.63 billion provided to Ontario through the federal Gas Tax Fund I mentioned earlier. Combined with investments under other federal infrastructure programs, Ontario has actually benefited from over \$12.3 billion toward infrastructure improvements across the province. This has meant that, according to Stats Canada, the average age of Ontario's infrastructure has essentially declined by 1.9 years since 2006, down to 13.4 years in 2012. So when the member opposite calls for significant long-term, reliable, stable infrastructure funding to build Ontario up, I would tell her that she may want to open her eyes because it's already there.

1430

But again, they've been using the blinders-on approach for so many years that I don't know if they'd even recognize stability if they fell over it. We see it over and over again here. Today's motion only continues the partisan gamesmanship in which the Ontario Liberals call out the feds on the lack of funding, to bolster Mr. Trudeau's campaign.

Just earlier this year, the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure's shot across the bow to the federal Minister of Infrastructure provides another sad example of the gamesmanship at work. In a December 2014 public letter to Minister of Infrastructure Denis Lebel, Ontario's economic development minister informed him that the Ontario government would be forwarding, in early 2015, (1) a "final list of priority projects under the Small Communities Fund; and (2) the second submission under the New Building Canada Fund" focusing on "transit and economic development projects."

We are now entering the fifth month of 2015, well past "early," and the only submissions received have been more rhetoric over lack of federal funding, when Ottawa is already at the table with available funding that the province is failing to access.

It begs the question: Is the province purposely holding back on project submissions in an attempted pre-election smear to make it appear that federal Conservatives aren't

funding transportation infrastructure? It's a legitimate question. The games continue.

When we look at last week's Ontario budget, on page 288 it clearly shows that the Canada Health Transfer increased by \$652 million this year—money the federal government has specifically earmarked for health care in Ontario. Yet, just one page later, on page 289, it shows that the Ontario health budget actually only increased by \$598 million. That's a discrepancy of \$54 million. They took \$54 million from the health care budget to pay for their fiscal mismanagement and then turn around and cry poor to Ottawa when they don't have enough to pay their bills.

The complete polar opposite approach to government was on full display last week in the tale of two budgets. Luckily, I had the rare opportunity in Ontario to see what it looks like when a government puts their work into getting its fiscal house in order—something we don't expect to see in this province for another three and a half years, at best.

While the Wynne Liberals wait for the day when, in the words of Justin Trudeau, "The budget will balance itself," the federal Conservatives were making the tough decisions that have resulted in a balanced budget. Ontario has seen \$14 billion in transfer payments flow from Ottawa since the Liberal government dragged us into have-not status, and somehow still can't balance a budget and continue to call for help. While Ontario has struggled through more than a decade of Liberal waste, mismanagement and scandal, the federal surplus in Ottawa has meant new opportunities for Canadians.

You see, when a government gets its fiscal house in order, it can actually help families and businesses. Example one is the federal initiative to deliver a \$27-billion package of family-focused tax cuts, including an expansion of the Universal Child Care Benefit. This is what leadership looks like: first taking care of our economic priorities so that we could take better care of our people.

Bottom line: I will not be supporting today's motion's thinly veiled pre-election attempt to take shots at the federal Conservatives in order to sway votes in the GTA. It's beneath this member to bring it forward but, unfortunately, par for the course in an indebted, spending-addicted Wynne Liberal Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I want to start by thanking the member for Mississauga–Brampton South for bringing this very important motion forward and recognizing the importance of investments in public transit and infrastructure, something that we don't hear around the House. We recognize the importance of investing in critical infrastructure and public transit. Infrastructure investment is critical to creating jobs and improving the quality of life for all Ontarians. Investments in infrastructure build on our public transportation network, and this critical infrastructure helps thousands of citizens get to work, run errands and visit family. Public transporta-

tion is key to getting cars off the road, improving our environment and increasing mobility, particularly for seniors and youth.

That's why our government is investing over \$130 billion in infrastructure across our province over the next 10 years—including roads, transit, schools and hospitals—making this the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario history, something we would like to have had our federal counterparts in Ottawa substantiate by their own investment in Ontario infrastructure.

In addition to this, our government has a long track record of investing in transit. Since 2004, the province has committed \$3.1 billion in gas tax funding to Ontario municipalities. Our government has shown its commitment to helping municipalities to maintain their road and bridge infrastructure, something that our federal government has not seen fit to do in its latest budget.

Over the last 10 years, the province has provided municipalities with approximately \$14 billion in infrastructure money. A billion dollars over this vast country of ours in the federal infrastructure program, starting in 2017, is shameful. We've included over \$200 million for small, rural and northern communities over the last two years alone. This funding has helped communities prepare asset management plans and address critical infrastructure needs.

These investments are important to the people of Ontario. Our investments in building roads, transit and transportation projects all benefit the national economy. While our government here in Ontario has a predictable long-term infrastructure plan, the federal government does not.

I fully support the motion brought by my colleague.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member from Mississauga—Brampton South.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I would like to thank all the members who spoke on my motion.

I would like to thank the member from Niagara Falls, and I agree with him that it's too little and it's too late. I would also like to thank the Minister of Transportation, the member from Cambridge and the member from Etobicoke Centre for their perspectives on this motion. I would also like to thank the members from Kitchener—Waterloo and Kitchener—Conestoga.

It is a shame that some of my colleagues chose to look at this motion as a partisan issue, when they could recognize it as an opportunity for leadership in the service of Ontarians. I have great respect for the member for Kitchener—Waterloo, but I would like to clarify that we are not selling Hydro One; we are investing and building new assets. When we build, we grow. When we invest, we grow.

It's a shame to see that the member for Kitchener—Conestoga has chosen to take it partisan. It is a reality—it is a truth—that the money will not flow until 2017-18. The money he is talking about that was spent in my riding was actually spent on building action plan billboards—nothing on the ground. It's zero on the ground, Mr. Speaker.

It is time for a new economic union, so that all governments can work together in support of the high-quality services Ontarians and Canadians rely on. I urge all members of this House to support this motion. Think about the well-being of the people of Ontario—our shared constituents—and about providing significant, long-term, reliable, stable infrastructure funding to build Ontario up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will take the vote on this item at the end of all private members' business.

GASOLINE TAX FAIRNESS FOR ALL ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ POUR TOUS À L'ÉGARD DE LA TAXE SUR L'ESSENCE

Mr. Yakubski moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 59, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to matching rebates of gasoline tax that the Minister provides to municipalities / *Projet de loi 59, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun à l'égard des remboursements de la taxe sur l'essence similaires consentis aux municipalités par le ministre.*

1440

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. John Yakubski: I really didn't plan to be doing this again, because you see, Speaker, when the government instituted their cap-and-trade-tax-on-everything plan and mentioned it in the budget and talked about it this year, that this is the way they're going to—they'd like to say they're going to save Ontario, but what they're going to do is raise \$2 billion to cover parts of the debt and deficits that they've run up on the people of Ontario.

When they brought in this scheme, it is very much directed unfairly at rural Ontarians, a tax on everything they do. One of the first things they talked about was, how is it going to impact motive fuels—gasoline, diesel? They say three cents a litre. In my experience, when the Liberals say three cents a litre, count on seven or eight because it never, ever amounts to what they say it was going to be. They undersell everything when they're raising taxes and oversell everything when they think they're providing you a benefit. This is the way the Liberals work in this province.

I see that Acting Speaker Miller has taken the chair. One of the reasons I say I'm bringing this back again is because—congratulations to him, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. He was rewarded today when his private member's bill was passed through third reading because of his persistency. Well, I am hopeful that if I have the same persistency, maybe these folks on the other side of the aisle, who always talk about fairness,

might actually inject a little into their thinking and some into their legislation as well.

They've had all kinds of opportunities to pass this. I did not plan to bring this forward again. But when the budget did not address the rural disparity—the disparity with which rural people pay the gas tax but do not get a share of it back—I said I'm sorry, but I've got to bring this back again because someone has to speak for rural Ontario. We do it on this side of the House, but unfortunately we're in the minority. The majority is on that side of the House, and they ignore rural Ontario. So again we have it one more time: Gas tax fairness for all here in the province of Ontario. Motive fuels are going up; the cost of driving in rural Ontario goes up again.

Before I go too far, I want to introduce two of my constituents here, who we had lunch with today. They were part of an auction to raise money for the Ottawa Valley Music Festival, and they lost and got lunch with me—John Hilborn and Elisabeth Van Wagner from my constituency of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I know they can't answer questions in this House but I know they drove here—no public transportation. So there we go. You see, in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, our roads, our sidewalks, our streets: That is our public transportation. You're inflicting more pain on to my rural people, raising the cost of gasoline because of your tax-on-everything.

You would think that there would be some balance on the Liberal side of the House and they would say, "Look, we're making it harder on rural Ontarians once again. So what we're going to do to balance that out is, we're going to do something that the federal government"—you know that government that you people like to grouse about all the time? We heard about it today in a motion. They're always going on and on and on about how the federal government is not doing its share. Well, perhaps they could learn something from the federal government.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakubuski: And I say this to the member from Scarborough: I understand you don't live in rural Ontario and you probably don't understand it, but please, you should just come up and visit once in a while. There is no LRT that's ever going to get to Deep River, I can tell you that much.

So I say to you, why don't you spend some time looking at the program that the federal government provides to all of the residents of every municipality here in the province of Ontario? You provide gas tax to 96 out of 444 municipalities; everybody else is cut off—96 out of 444. The federal government provides a share of gas tax revenue to all municipalities—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Newmarket–Aurora and the member from Barrie.

Mr. John Yakubuski: It's not just the gas tax. It's not just the rise in gasoline. Rural people have been penalized because they have no choice but to drive. There is no choice. I see all of these urban members here, and they're laughing. They think it's funny. They should

have to live in rural Ontario and put up with the reality of rural Ontario and how difficult it is.

So what do you people do? A couple of years ago, you raised the price of vehicle licences. You can live in the city of Toronto here and never have to own a vehicle if you choose not to. You can't get away without a vehicle in rural Ontario. If you live in a small town in rural Ontario, you have to have a vehicle or you're homebound—homebound. What did the Liberals do to rural Ontario a couple of years ago? They raised all the prices for vehicle licences—one more nail in the coffin.

Then we've got hydro rates—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The three amigos down there are very aggressive. Mr. Paul doesn't like it.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): And our little friend from Scarborough–Agincourt is very, very active. Can we cut it back a little bit? I know you may not like what the member has to say, but we'll give him some leeway. Thank you.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: He's awfully loud.

Mr. John Yakubuski: The minister says I'm too loud. Perhaps she should get some earplugs. When I'm speaking for the people in my riding and the people of rural Ontario, I'm going to speak up. Somebody has to because you ignore them; all of you urban members on the other side of the House continue to ignore them.

Let's talk about hydro rates. When you live in rural Ontario, chances are you live in a detached home. You don't live in a condominium, you don't live in an apartment; you live in a detached home with four walls facing the elements each and every day of the year, whether it's the cold of the winter or the heat of the summer. So we're getting penalized more by the exorbitant increase in the rates of hydro put on by this government. What do you get in return from the Liberals' government? Nothing.

So I'm asking again, why don't you do the right thing? Do what the federal government has been doing for years. It just boggles my mind when you people sit there and complain about the federal government and say the federal government is unfair, but you have the opportunity here today to show some fairness. You've ignored it repeatedly each time that I have asked for it.

I'll just give you a little bit of a list here from my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. Amprior, federal government gas tax allocation last year: \$234,944; provincial gas tax allocation: zero—zero. Bonnechere Valley: \$108,959 from the federal government, and how much did they get from the provincial government? Zero. Deep River—my friends from Deep River are here today. Deep River got from the federal government last year \$121,410, and how much did they get from the provincial government?

Mr. Grant Crack: Zero.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Thank you very much, I say to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. He an-

swers the question because he knows the Liberal policy. When it comes to money for rural Ontario, it is zero.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, come to order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Laurentian Valley, neighbours of Deep River, up there in that area: \$279,622 from the federal government; from the provincial government, absolutely nothing.

Speaker, I don't have a lot of time left, but the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, the wardens of all of the counties of eastern Ontario, have repeatedly asked you to do exactly what I'm calling for you to do, and that is to share the gas tax revenue with rural municipalities. You continue to ignore them. You continue to say no. They're only asking the same thing. They get the federal money. They want you to do the same thing. Why do you continue to turn your nose down at the people of rural Ontario? It is unfair. It is a matter of fundamental fairness.

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You see, Speaker, whenever someone in rural Ontario needs to go anywhere, they've got to get into a vehicle to do it. And every time they get into that vehicle, they burn fuel, and every time they burn fuel, they have to fill it up, and every time they fill it up, they pay gas tax. They pay a proportionately greater share of the gas tax to the province of Ontario than you could ever pay, living here in the city of Toronto. A much greater proportion of the gas tax is paid by rural people.

It would only seem reasonable and fair that if you're paying a higher proportion, a higher percentage of your income—and hey, folks, let's not kid ourselves. If you think the incomes in rural Ontario are anything near what they are in urban Ontario, you're dreaming in technicolor. They've got lower incomes. They have to spend more money on fuel; they pay a much higher percentage of the gas tax than the urban people pay; and they get nothing back—nothing.

So ask yourselves this question: Does that sound fair to you? I say to the member from Scarborough, does that sound fair to you? Does that—

Ms. Soo Wong: Check your facts.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My facts are all verifiable, I say to you. Does that sound fair to you? I say, does that sound fair to you? She cannot stand up and say, "Yes, it sounds fair," because no one who speaks about equity and equality could look at those numbers and say that it is fair.

Speaker, I'm hoping—
Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You'll have your chance to make your point. We'll be glad to hear it, because it will be that fluff stuff you get out of the corner office on the second floor that doesn't make any sense anyway.

But will they speak for rural Ontario? I doubt it very much. It is time that your government—you know, when the Premier came to my county and came to the farm of Wade and Ann Schroeder, she didn't come there by the subway. She drove there, just like I did. She heard first-

hand the concerns of people in rural Ontario, and she left, and then she must have got a selective case of amnesia, because she has done nothing to address them since.

This is an opportunity to do that. I ask you to do the right thing: Stand in your place and support rural Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Paul Miller: Wow.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Yes, wow. How do you follow that? For whatever reason, every time I seem to get up, I'm following you, my good friend. Darn.

You've put me in a very difficult position in regard to this one and, actually, for many municipalities in my riding. I'll try to highlight the difficulties that I'm having with your proposed private member's bill.

I want to thank the member for introducing this. It's my pleasure and privilege, as it is always, to stand on behalf of the good people in Algoma-Manitoulin. My riding covers communities that do have transit and others that don't. But all of them are united in saying that their challenge is they need definite, focused, targeted infrastructure funding.

I want to thank the Speaker for providing me this opportunity: An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to matching rebates of gasoline tax that the Minister provides to municipalities.

As I alluded to, some of the challenges across Algoma-Manitoulin are that in certain areas, you don't have a choice to jump on a bus. Quite frankly, some of those communities are feeling the negative impacts of the policies of this government by losing some of those services that were once there, not just across my riding but across northern Ontario. That transit, those bus facilities, the ONTC—all of those are under attack across northern Ontario. And you don't have to look very far. You just have to look across the way, because it's their policies that have affected those communities across this province, particularly across northern Ontario.

Yes, I completely agree that small municipalities need secure and predictable funding for highways and bridge repairs. That's absolutely needed. Nobody is questioning that. A lot of the municipalities across the north are definitely asking for that.

However, we're disappointed. For all the government's talk about building infrastructure, the latest budget shows mainly a plan to defer building infrastructure. We've talked about long-term plans and 10-year plans, but there's no targeted concrete plan that is going to be reflected in order to help the individuals across Algoma-Manitoulin or northern Ontario. All that we see is the north still being ignored in this budget—to its detriment—for other parts of this province.

When you read this budget, northern Ontario is completely left out of it. I constantly hear from mayors and groups in regard to, "Well, what about us? What happened to our infrastructure? When is it going to come? When do we hear about our news?" I'll try and touch on that a little bit later in some of my comments.

As for this bill, while we agree that small, rural communities absolutely need more stable and predictable funding for infrastructure, this should not come at a cost of reduced funding for transit, which this bill, as it is written, would do.

I agree with the member that we shouldn't be taking away funding that is existing, that is dependent—that already cash-strapped municipalities are receiving. We should be increasing it. I agree with you, my friend. There should be a fair share of the pie, but not taking it away from others who rely on it so much. There's been so much downloading that a lot of these dollars are so desperately needed for some of these municipalities—actually for all of the municipalities, and you know that.

The 2% of the gas tax is a fixed amount of money amounting to roughly \$300 million a year. The bill, as it is written, would take away from the current rebates that municipalities receive to help fund their transit systems. In other words, there would be an absolute reduction in funds going to fund transit operations. I know you don't want to see that. I know this is not the message that we want to put out there. What we want to see is stable funding in order to provide a piece of the pie for everyone, but not at a reduction of some.

I have some municipalities, like Elliot Lake, Espanola and Chapleau, which do have transit systems. There are others that are starting to develop their own transit systems in order to benefit from some of the funding that is there. But again, we don't want to see this move forward and hurt them.

Those are some of the struggles that I have with your bill, my friend.

During the OGRA/ROMA meeting this year, delegates from communities across my riding and across the north made it clear that funding for municipalities with transit systems should not be reduced, but rather that the pool of funds that are made available through the gas tax program should be expanded so that municipalities without a transit system would be able to benefit from the funding stream. My riding of Algoma-Manitoulin has many smaller municipalities who would benefit greatly if this sort of funding was made available.

I want to mention in some of the discussion some of the municipalities that many in this House have not heard of because they don't fall under municipalities. They're roads boards, they're local services boards, they're un-organized territories—like Agawa Bay, Amyot, Dalton, Dunns Valley, Fire River, Franz, Frater, Girdwood, Goudreau, Island Lake, Leeburn, Lochalsh, MacDuff, Montreal River, Oba, Ophir, Parkinson, Poplar Dale, Ranger Lake, Ryerson, Swanson, Wabos, and some of the local service boards such as Aweres, Batchawana Bay, Dawson, Goulais, Hawk Junction, Missanabie, Peace Tree, Rainbow Country, Robinson, Searchmont, Wharncliffe and Kynoch. These are areas that I feel are not being reflected right now in this bill, and they too want a piece of the pie. They are also struggling with some of their infrastructure. They want to be considered as well.

Northern communities are also waiting for the infrastructure dollars that would come out of the Ring of Fire, but we're going to have to wait another three to four years before anything happens with the Ring of Fire. I've read the budget. I've looked at the budget. I hear some of the comments that this government has made in that regard. I see a recommitment of a billion-dollar strategy, and then it refers me to another section to get a more detailed account of what it actually says. It just reiterates that there is a commitment once again, but we won't see any funding in the Ring of Fire. This is the spending that we desperately need in northern Ontario in order to address the infrastructure that we so desperately need.

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The mayor of Timmins, Steve Black, highlights in some of his comments in a newsletter that he put out; if you want to look it up, it's called www.kisstimmings.com. He says, "The government clearly has a lack of understanding when it comes to the challenges it has created when it abandoned the 90% funding it used to contribute just a few years ago."

He goes on to say, "Sure this amount is good news compared to where we were yesterday, but it falls far short from where we need to be! This funding will barely cover the patch work that needs to be done across the Connecting Link on an annual basis and will fall significantly short from the costs of the major reconstruction work required in the coming years...."

"I can't understand how our share of the \$15 million annual amount for all municipalities is going to address our challenges ahead for a highway that used to be funded 90% by the province. In addition, over \$60 million in funding was removed from the Connecting Link program when previous funding of this program was terminated in 2012" by the Liberal government. "There is no mention of the transition funding to make up for the four years this program was not funded."

These are just some of the comments that are being put out there by our mayors and organizations.

In closing, I want to share whatever time is—

Interjection: Keep going.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Okay. Then I'll keep going. I'll be able to finish off what I started.

Just last year, we heard the Premier make a recommitment, to commit \$1 billion towards the Ring of Fire. The development of the Ring of Fire would lead to huge, huge infrastructure dollars which are so desperately needed in this province. However, when you read the budget, you hear the commitment of the billion dollars, but you can't find it. All you hear is the commitment and the wording that is there. To find those actual dollars in their budget to determine where and how that money is going to be spent—you can't find it.

That is what this province actually needs so much. That influx would provide us the infrastructure dollars that we need for our roads, our hydro, our health care and education. We need a real commitment.

We heard a commitment during the campaign that we're going to do this with or without our federal part-

ners. However, when you read the budget: “The province has committed up to \$1 billion for strategic transportation infrastructure development in the region. The province calls the federal government to the table as a willing and active partner to match Ontario’s investments and seize the opportunities in the Ring of Fire.”

Once again, that \$1 billion is going to stay on the shelf, collecting dust, taking away opportunities from those First Nations in order to build their capacity, in order to bring the much-needed jobs to those areas, in order to bring the roads and the infrastructure we need, in order to balance some of our expenses that we have in this province, in order to bring the monies back to this province to enhance our revenues in order to bring the proper infrastructure that we need. That is the reality of what’s in this budget.

Back to my friend in regard to his bill: I agree that stable funding is needed. I have many small municipalities, many small communities, that would love to see more stable, targeted infrastructure dollars that they would benefit from and that would enhance the infrastructure in their community, but again, it is not at the penalty of others that we’re going to benefit everybody.

I congratulate the member for his tenacity in bringing his bill forward. It’s because of individuals like the member that I always enjoy sitting in the House; speaking up for all members in your riding is an important issue. I feel the passion that the member does, but I know that he would not want to penalize some to the benefit of others.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It’s my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 59, introduced by the member opposite. I would like to clarify a few aspects of the gas tax program that I believe this bill overlooks and ignores. All of the members in this House know how committed this government is to partnering with municipalities to ensure strong infrastructure for transit and transportation. The Ministry of Transportation is dedicated to ensuring accessible public transit across Ontario’s municipalities.

Since 2004, the Ontario government has pledged \$3.1-billion worth of funding of revenue from the gas tax to help Ontario municipalities provide adequate funding for their public transit systems. Municipalities will additionally receive \$321 million in the 2014-15 year and 132 communities covering 90% of Ontarians will receive gas tax funding to supplement funding for their transit systems.

Bill 59 would alter the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act so as to allow municipalities without public transit systems to acquire funding from the gas tax in order to fund projects other than public transit, including the building of bridges and highways.

We all know that the purpose of the gas tax program is to provide municipalities funding from the province for transit. This has always been the goal of the gas tax. That’s not to say this government is not committed to municipalities without public transit systems as well.

This past August I was proud to be part of the government that introduced the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, which provides smaller and rural municipalities with a regular source of funding for infrastructure. As PA for transportation, I met with municipal leaders at AMO and ROMA asking whether the gas tax funds could be used for projects other than public transit. I encouraged them to apply for the OCIF if it was an infrastructure project because the OCIF provides a stable \$100 million per year for preserving roads, bridges and other key pieces of infrastructure.

My friend from Algoma-Manitoulin can encourage his many municipalities to apply for these funds for infrastructure programs.

Indeed, there are rural municipalities that do not receive funding under the gas tax program, but they are eligible for funding as soon as they introduce a public transit system, no matter how small a project it is, which I have said is the target of the program.

There are many problems with this bill. The new formula for funding under the proposed change to the gas tax program is confusing. It bases funding upon the total distance of highways and municipalities and suggests that transit ridership is comparable with highway distance. The member from the opposition does not specify in his bill how the funding would be spent, nor whether there would need to be an alteration in the existing gas tax in order to fund the change.

If it does not require a change in the actual tax, the effectiveness of this program would be diluted and municipalities that currently use the program to fund their transit projects would be worse off. If the bill does require a change, then it violates the stipulations of private members’ business, which, we all know, cannot procure funds.

This bill also aims to pit municipalities against one another and attempts to claim that this government is not ready and willing to support rural municipalities and help rural communities to build the roads and bridges that they need. This is simply untrue. This government is committed to rural development and has invested over \$97 million in rural economic development projects since 2003.

We have attempted with the gas tax program to right the wrongs that the Progressive Conservatives began. It was Mike Harris and Ernie Eves who downloaded the responsibility of transit upon municipalities and prevented them adequate ability to invest in their public transit systems. It was also the Tories who shifted the responsibility of provincial highways and bridges onto these rural municipalities, which negatively affected the condition of their infrastructure.

The gas tax program is a fundamental program for investment in public transit, and dozens of municipalities rely on this funding for the growth and vitality of their economies. Bill 59 would impair the gas tax program and hurt municipalities across Ontario.

1510

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to my colleague's bill, the Gasoline Tax Fairness for All Act. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has been a relentless advocate for municipalities, and I'm happy to lend my support to him today.

This bill will amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to give all municipalities the opportunity to benefit from the provincial gas tax. Under the current funding model, only municipalities with a rapid transit or public transit system are eligible for a tax rebate. This bill is about creating a level playing field among all municipalities.

In 2014, gas tax revenue was only distributed to 96 of 444 municipalities, even though all municipalities contributed to the fund. This is a glaring inequity that needs to be corrected. Speaker, all municipalities should have access to the funds they need to build and maintain their transportation infrastructure.

We all recognize that there is a glaring infrastructure deficit in this province. Giving all municipalities access to the funds they contribute to the Gas Tax Fund is one important step to address the issues facing our transportation system. The longer this government waits to fix the current funding model, the worse the infrastructure deficit will become.

Speaker, when we talk about transportation, we talk a lot about public transit. I think we all admit that public transit is, in fact, very important; however, we must not forget about roads, highways and bridges. We have to take a holistic view of our infrastructure priorities to ensure that all Ontarians have safe and efficient transportation options.

This bill is about fairness. Gas tax revenue should not be limited to municipalities with public transportation. For rural areas, roads and bridges are the only form of transportation. Rural municipalities should be able to use the gas tax funds they contribute to maintain their roads and bridges. We should not simply continue to support a funding model that benefits just urban municipalities to the detriment of our rural ones: one Ontario.

This bill would also provide a stable and predictable funding structure for municipalities. This is something that municipalities have been requesting for years, and I commend the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for introducing this legislation.

In my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, I have three townships: Wilmot, Wellesley and Woolwich. All of these townships would undoubtedly benefit from having increased funding under the provincial gas tax.

Currently, the federal government distributes their Gas Tax Fund to all municipalities. The federal government's effort to fund transportation infrastructure using their gas tax has been evident in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga. The township of Woolwich received approximately \$1 million in 2012–13 to resurface roads. Also, from the beginning of the program to 2013, the region of Waterloo has received over \$94 million from the federal Gas Tax Fund.

It is time for the provincial government to step up and expand their gas tax program to all municipalities. The

gas tax should not be limited to building public transit. It should be used to ensure that all municipalities have the ability to build and maintain their roads, highways and bridges, as well as their public transit systems.

For too long, many rural municipalities have had to go without receiving money from the provincial gas tax. As the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has pointed out, there is nothing stopping the government from expanding the benefits of the gas tax rebate to all municipalities. The only way we can fix the infrastructure deficit we currently face is to fix the broken funding model.

I ask the members of this House to support this bill. Together, we can help to correct the inequities of a flawed funding model and restore fairness to the gas tax rebate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I look at this bill and the efforts of the member to expand the use of the gas tax to rural municipalities and municipalities that do not have transit systems. The very purpose of establishing this fund was to enhance and expand public transit across the province. Were there not other pots of money for rural Ontario—the area he talks about—I think he would be justified. But there are. The government has specifically made other funds available that my community of St. Catharines, for instance, is not eligible for, nor should it be. The rural economic development funds that are put forward, other infrastructure funds—some \$200 million for small, rural and northern communities over the last two years—are important funding; it's justified funding. But the specific purpose of the gas tax at the provincial level is to establish, enhance and expand public transit, something that is a purported goal of all political parties and most people in this province. That is why I say to the people who want to expand this to other communities, that means less money for St. Catharines. It means less money for Niagara Falls, less money for the municipalities that have transit services or are beginning transit services.

I think it's quite justified for the government to have—and it should have other funds available for the municipality. I understand the argument that the member puts forward about the fact that people drive in his community; I understand that. That's why I like the other funds that are available to those municipalities, particularly funds for provincial highways, but also for local roadways. When I was Minister of Transportation, my hand got sore from signing all of the allocations of money to rural Ontario for road purposes. When I was Minister of Municipal Affairs, same thing. People would say, "Well, were they Liberal ridings?" No, they were Conservative ridings, but that didn't mean anything to me. It meant, do we have a separate fund to assist those municipalities? The answer is yes. If I see people in my own community, my Conservative friends, who say, "Why aren't you supporting it?" I'll say, "Would you like to have less money to expand and enhance our transit services in St. Catharines and other communities?"

I understand the intent of the bill. I understand the member wanting to see funds made available for the projects he's talking about. That's quite legitimate. That's why this government has established those other funds, for which my municipality and others are not eligible. For this reason, I will not be able to support this particular bill, but I will continue to support funds that would be available for municipalities that don't have transit systems from other pots of money within the jurisdiction of the provincial government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to stand today and speak on my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke's bill, the Gasoline Tax Fairness for All Act, 2015, which I believe I have spoken to many times in this Legislature. As he has said, he has tried many times to introduce this bill that would actually be fair to people in rural Ontario.

Everybody in Ontario, and anybody in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, pays gas tax and they want more benefit from it. Currently, the gas tax revenue is only distributed to municipalities with public transportation systems, and only 96 out of 444 municipalities receive it. This bill would ensure that gas tax revenue is shared with townships and smaller municipalities for roads and bridges instead of designating it solely for public transportation systems.

We all know rural Ontario. We all have to drive everywhere to get to jobs, school and work. Our young people have to get their driver's licence as soon as they can to go to their summer jobs, if they're lucky enough to get one. Roads and bridges are our public transportation system. The member has eloquently said that you can't take a subway to get to destinations in our ridings. You can't even take a subway to get from Toronto to my riding.

This has been supported by municipalities in my riding in the past. The government says they have other ways that they give money to rural municipalities. It is still primarily a lottery system. Some of my municipalities cross their fingers. Some get money for a local bridge. One gets money; five, six, seven do not. It makes it tough for municipalities to plan.

The federal government giving their portion of dedicated gas tax money has brought millions more dollars to municipalities to help them with their infrastructure. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke wants this mimicked for the provincial portion of the gas tax.

We all pay more in rural Ontario for gas, as he said, because we're more likely to own a car. We have more vehicles. He mentioned the increase in the vehicle licence fee we now have to take upon ourselves. We pay more for hydro. This government has to acknowledge the fact that they are not treating rural Ontario fairly. This bill was brought in with fairness in mind for all Ontarians, and I implore the government to consider again and to pass this bill. I'm sure they can go, in the back of their minds—that there must be some hope that they'll be positive towards this bill.

1520

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: It's my privilege to stand in the House to speak to Bill 59, the Gasoline Tax Fairness for All Act, 2014.

As the minister without portfolio has already noted, the gas tax program is specifically there to address transit ridership in municipalities across our province, with the intent of increasing it, of course. For this reason, the gas tax funding is dedicated to municipalities that provide a public transit service.

With climate change a significant issue in our province, and indeed across the world, increasing the number of people who use public transit across our province is in everyone's interests. Of course, our efforts to mitigate climate change will not only benefit my community by encouraging the development of sustainable development technologies, increasing our economic leadership; it will also enhance the health and well-being of citizens across our province, including those who live in the honourable member's riding.

How do I know this, Speaker? I used to live there. I had the privilege of living in Eganville. The natural beauty of the honourable member's area is highly treasured. Places like Algonquin Park, the wetlands and the wildlife are all significant, and all will be significantly impacted, and already are, by climate change.

I also know and understand the importance of transportation infrastructure, and I know the member does too. That's why I'm hoping that he will pick up the phone and call his federal cousins and ask them to step up, because their funding for infrastructure pales in comparison to our \$130 billion over the next 10 years, including \$16 billion for infrastructure—wait for it—outside the GTHA.

Speaking of communities outside the GTHA, in August of last year, our government launched the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, designed to provide predictable and steady funding to—wait for it—small, rural and northern communities for the maintenance of their infrastructure, including roads and bridges. This \$100-million fund, half of which is based on applications—and I know that our ministry officials and the Ministry of Transportation would happily accept an application from Bonnechere Valley, Quadeville or Barry's Bay. That fund will help communities repair or replace critical infrastructure, without taking funding away from other municipalities that need it for public transit.

There's also the Connecting Link Program, provided to municipalities to assist with road construction, maintenance and repairs—355 kilometres of roadway and 70 bridges. It's something municipalities asked for, and we're doing it. Why? Because we listened.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: We listened.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Exactly. Over the past decade, our government has provided infrastructure funding to municipalities across our province in excess of \$14 billion, including nearly \$200 million for small, rural and

northern communities over the past two years. Clearly, we're committed to ensuring that all communities in Ontario are able to maintain their crucial transportation infrastructure.

By the way, municipal leaders from Windsor to Wawa, from Kitchener to, yes, Calabogie and, I'm sure, Arnprior too, are all pleased about our investments in infrastructure. Why? Because we are building Ontario up.

In closing, while I understand the spirit of the bill, I will not be supporting it. Pitting one community against another, rural against urban, is not leadership. It may be good politics, but it's bad public policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a real pleasure to join the debate right now in support of my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

If you want to talk about somebody with determination for fairness; if you want to talk about somebody with a dedication to rural Ontario; if you want to talk about somebody who believes in the inherent unfairness, with this Liberal government, particularly to our rural Ontario communities, it is Mr. Yakabuski. I think he has highlighted this issue time and time and time again.

If you want to talk, I say to the member from Burlington, about pitting one community against another, try representing a rural Ontario riding. Our communities have been consistently, time and time again, the object of the Liberals' disaffection.

This is a government that has not only forced wind turbines onto our communities and destroyed our horse racing industry, as my colleague from Kawartha Lakes–Brock will tell you, but this is also a government that has two-tiered government when it comes to fairness for our roads and our highways with respect to the gas tax. My colleague Mr. Yakabuski has been so forceful on this issue that the 2007, 2011 and 2014 Progressive Conservative platforms reflected this inherent unfairness and have tried to rectify it.

If the Liberals want to talk today about picking fights with the federal government, if the Liberals want to talk today about infrastructure, if they want to talk today about roads, transit and transportation, if they want to talk today about fairness and pitting communities against communities, they can go right ahead. At the end of the day, the person who is morally right on this issue, the person who deserves support for this private member's resolution, is my colleague Mr. Yakabuski.

I will say this in closing: I happen to have a riding which is inside the city of Ottawa. Part of my constituents receive this funding from the government because they buy into something I support, which is LRT.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Nice new bridge.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You can listen and then you might learn. Honest to gosh, it's true. I could actually teach you something.

The fact is, my constituents in the rural part of Ottawa are being shortchanged, and I don't think it's fair. I don't think it's right. As a result, I congratulate my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I got a few extra minutes there, and I really appreciate it. I want to thank the members for Algoma–Manitoulin; Cambridge; Kitchener–Conestoga; the deputy House leader; Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, Burlington; Nepean–Carleton—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Beaches–East York.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I missed one.

Let's talk about the comments that my friend from Algoma–Manitoulin made. He's right. He doesn't want to see money lost from other programs because it would be dedicated to a rural gas tax. This would cost about \$40 million. The government is about to pass, with their majority, a budget that has \$132 billion of spending. This is about \$40 million. This is the same government that wasted \$2 billion on eHealth, \$1.1 billion on cancelled gas plants and \$1.9 billion on smart meters when it should have cost \$1 billion. And they gave \$200 million to Cisco. If you don't think they can come up with \$40 million, then I think we need to do a better job of managing the money. It's there; they just have to have the commitment to fairness.

I say to the members on the other side—they keep talking, and the deputy House leader said, "Oh, we have programs." The member from Burlington talked about the \$100-million fund, and she talked about pitting communities against communities. That's exactly what that fund does, because it is a lottery. There is no sustainability. There is no assurance that you will get funding. The federal government gas tax program ensures—and it has been made permanent—that, each and every year, those communities get their share of the gas tax rebate. Your program is a lottery. You have to apply. You may win; you may lose. It pits communities against one another all the time. It picks winners and losers. You want to talk about fairness. It boggles my mind that you can even use the word "fairness" when you bring in one of your funding programs.

The minister said that he used to get tired signing the orders of funding for a rural transportation or infrastructure project. Well, you know what? It shouldn't come down to the signature of a minister. It should be guaranteed, sustainable, long-term, assured funding. It doesn't come down to the stroke of a pen or as to whether the minister says yes or no. It comes down to a legislated program that says, "We respect rural Ontario. We will share the gas tax revenue with them because they pay more than their share into it." It would cost \$40 million out of \$132 billion.

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You've got to figure it out, folks. This government wastes—in fact, the debt: They spend \$32 million more a day than they take in in this government. So a day and a few hours would take care of the rural funding for a gas tax rebate in this province. They can't find it, because they don't want to find it. They would rather have a lottery program where we can have one rural community

begging on hands and knees to the ministry: "Would you give us funding for this infrastructure project?" Then, when the government says no, they have to go back to their taxpayers and say, "We can't fix the sidewalks on Jones Street. We can't fix the sidewalks on Main Street. We can't do it this year, because we didn't win the government's lottery program."

A hundred million dollars? That's a joke. If you could say \$100 million and it will be shared, that every community gets this share, that's another story. There is no fairness in a lottery. I've never won the lottery, and most of the communities under your program won't win it either.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. We'll take the vote at the end of private members' business.

CHILD CARE

SERVICES DE GARDE D'ENFANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I move that, in the opinion of this House, child care should be accessible and affordable for all Ontarians regardless if they live in urban, suburban or rural Ontario or what their economic circumstances are, and further, that parental choice and responsibility be respected; to accomplish that goal, the regulations accompanying the Child Care Modernization Act should allow flexibility for independent child care operators—consideration for age and own children allowances; an appeal mechanism to ensure all child care providers have equal access to due process; and that the regulatory regime allows for a fairer distribution of inspectors to child care case files based on input from operators and associations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. MacLeod has moved private member's notice of motion number 44. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to introduce this resolution for something that I have really believed in for a number of years, starting out first as an activist and then, of course, upon entering this assembly in 2006, and that is choice in child care.

First, before I speak, I would like to recognize two people, and through them a number of others who they have coordinated over the past year and a half, as they have been confronted with challenges to independent child care operations across the province. First and most notably would be Heidi Higgins of the Coalition of Independent Childcare Providers of Ontario.

Heidi has created a group right across Ontario of mothers, of parents and of child care operators who are concerned with the Child Care Modernization Act and who would like to have a voice in the regulatory framework. I know Heidi is watching at home, and, Heidi, I want to say thank you on behalf of all of the parents who you are fighting for. I want you to know that I will continue to raise your voice and your ideas and your issues here on the floor of the assembly.

The second is a friend of mine, someone who I became very close with over the last year because of her advocacy for choice in child care. She is a mother from Oakville. I don't think our paths would have ever crossed unless I became an MPP, and her so vocally and passionately supportive of the other parents and mothers who own in-home child care facilities. Her name is Tracy Skelton. Tracy, throughout this process, has found her voice, a very strong voice as a passionate advocate, someone who has coordinated people throughout the province in talking about how we can best address child care challenges in the province of Ontario.

I would be remiss not to recognize the efforts of Tracy Skelton in my brief run for the leadership of my party. Tracy believed in me, as I believe in her, and created a group called #moms4lisa right across Ontario. Through Tracy, I was able to meet parents not only from my own city of Ottawa, but from her city of Oakville, from Burlington, from Brampton. I met people from Thunder Bay and Sudbury and in Belleville—right across this great province. She opened those doors for me to meet people who had never thought they would ever be impacted by the Ontario Legislature until perhaps it was too late.

To Tracy, I know you are at home and I know you are watching this while you care for the children in your home, and I want to say to you: Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Everything you have done for me has been meaningful, and I hope to do you justice with this issue.

As I mentioned, my record on child care predates my visit to this assembly. I was elected in 2006, but prior to that, in 2005, I had my daughter, Victoria. In the 2006 federal election, it was at the facility where my daughter went to Gymboree where Prime Minister Stephen Harper held his "choice in child care" press conference to announce the first ever Universal Child Care Benefit. That was a very poignant day for me, and it was there that I recognized the need for mothers and fathers, not only across Canada but in particular in the province of Ontario, to have choice in where they send their children for care.

In 2007, I was the children and youth services critic for the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus, and then-leader John Tory tasked me with putting forward a plan. We reiterated our plan to give money directly to parents rather than to bureaucracies because we felt it was necessary for them to have a choice in child care as well.

Through 2009 and 2010, and again through 2011 and 2013, I advocated for choice in child care again as the government plans to bring in full-day kindergarten challenged many of those agencies throughout our ridings, particularly those at the YMCAs and other areas. Again, between 2014 and now, 2015, I've been talking about the Child Care Modernization Act and the impact that that has had on independent child care operators from Ottawa to Oakville, all the way to Sault Ste. Marie.

I've always firmly believed that parents are responsible for their children but they should also be

respected and allowed to choose which child care options they feel best fit the needs of their family as well as their child.

In fact, just in today's National Post, Tasha Kheiriddin, someone I've known for quite some time, probably well over 20 years, had written an op-ed about busting Canada's daycare myths. I'm not going to quote her article, but I do want to point this out because there was a study that was done.

I'm going to quote this one part, and then I think I'll talk a little bit more about my philosophy and why I think we need to move forward with some regulatory environment that does include independent child care operators. It says: "When asked what child care they prefer, parents name themselves, followed by family members, home daycare, and lastly, centre-based care."

I think that's very important to recognize because it does initiate a discussion in Ontario where I think one group would like to have only centre-based care and another would say, "Okay, give us some choices." I tend to be with more choice. I think the best way to achieve affordable and accessible child care is by respecting parents' wishes and allowing the government to have a good regulatory environment by which to enforce the law, rather than to dictate to moms and dads where they should send their child for care.

With Bill 10, I've often warned that we may be at risk of losing 40,000 affordable child care spaces, not in downtown Ottawa, not in downtown Toronto, but predominantly in suburbs, particularly growing areas like my riding of Nepean—Carleton and areas in the GTHA.

In addition to that, because we're dealing with some of the accessibility issues, we're going to deal with affordability issues. It's very difficult today, given high hydro prices and the increase we're going to see on our gasoline prices, to raise a child. I think it's important that we do have a cost balance within our minds about how we can best address this.

I think if you're going to talk about child care you must always include independent child care operators. I know there will be some in this assembly who will point to an Ombudsman's report that they neither read nor understood, and they will want to use certain quotes. But I took the time, actually, because André Marin, the Ombudsman, is a constituent of mine. We often will meet and have lunch or we'll have a meeting in my office back in Barrhaven. We talked about child care just before Christmas. I said, "The Liberals are suggesting, for example, that you're recommending getting rid of independent child care operators." He said, "No such thing. My children have actually gone through the independent child care system." In fact, I must admit, Speaker, my daughter has as well, and I value that. I know other members, even in the government, have used that as well.

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But what the Ombudsman talked about at that time, when he put forward a report on independent child care, was this: The government, particularly the Ministry of Education, was unable or unwilling—I'm not sure,

either—to enforce its regulations, and inspectors weren't being sent out. As a result of that, children were put at risk.

What this resolution would specifically aim to do is to have the voice of an independent child care operator sit with the minister through the regulatory framework and discuss issues that would allow all child care operators and providers to have equal access to due process, and the regulatory regime would require a fairer distribution of inspectors to child care case files.

I think that's the government's role here. I think the government's role is not to tell moms and dads which child care provider they go to. The government's role—and it is necessarily the job of government—is to have strict regulation and strict enforcement, particularly when children are at the fore.

I respect all folks' options. I know we've made a choice, my husband and I, to have our daughter cared for by two individuals: the first from zero up to six, in an in-home child care facility, and from six to now 10 years old and probably beyond, she's in the loving care of one of our neighbours, Myrna Hay.

Myrna is in her seventies. She spent 40 years looking after the kids in my daughter's school, Manordale Public School in Ottawa. Myrna is an institution. She's one of the most respected volunteers with our community association and the school. She's like an adopted mother to my husband and I, and I couldn't think of anyone who would be better suited to care for our child than this woman, because I know she loves her.

What concerns me about this bill is that we're telling Ontarians, moms and dads, that they don't necessarily have the right to have that same choice. Again, I respect the fact that the Legislature decided to move and pursue Bill 10. I respect the fact—I don't necessarily agree with it—that they turned it into law. But what I'm asking for today is some fairness for those mothers and fathers who choose the options that I've chosen and that so many others have chosen. I'm asking them to respect the independent child care operators who would like to be part of the process and part of the solution for accessible and affordable child care in our suburban, rural and urban communities, regardless of one's income.

The implications of not allowing this important voice to be heard are 40,000 child care spaces to be lost. When I visited Sudbury last fall, we heard that 1,200 local spaces in that area, the Nickel Belt/Sudbury area, would be lost. We also heard, not too long after that, a study that cited that the most expensive child care spaces in all of Canada were actually in Brampton, and as a result, that would even increase the costs more.

Speaker, I don't think it's unreasonable to have early childhood educators, independent child care operators and private daycare providers that own a centre be included in the regulatory environment and to discuss some of the issues that I have raised in this resolution.

I'm seeking support from members of this assembly. This is a resolution that must be respected, because it is important that we have all voices in child care at the table when we set the regulatory environment.

I would like to say thank you to all members for indulging me in this debate so that I was able to put my ideas forward. To those at home—and I know there are many of you, as you look after your children, watching this debate, thinking you would never be involved in politics, but you are today—I want to say thank you for taking your time to become part of the process and understanding that the legislation that we implement here at the Legislature impacts you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further order? The member for—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to note that Amin Ali, Steph Brown, Sue Craig and Matthew—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Just a second. You can ask for a point of order, but I've got to recognize you.

The member for Toronto—Danforth, on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Why, thank you, Speaker. I'd like to recognize Amin Ali, Steph Brown, Sue Craig and Matthew Griffin from the Scarborough-area NDP youth. Welcome.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to be able to participate in this debate this afternoon, and I want to thank the member for Nepean—Carleton for her efforts on this issue and for bringing this motion forward.

Without question, New Democrats wholeheartedly agree with the first part of this motion that child care should be accessible and should be affordable for all Ontarians, regardless of where they live in this province and regardless of their economic circumstances. We also recognize that independent home child care operators have an important role to play in the child care system. We know that the quality of child care is not determined solely on the basis of where the care is provided: in a home or in a centre.

The member from Nepean—Carleton talked about her experience with child care. I have had a perspective on both sides: home-based care and centre-based care. When my first child was seven months—that was before women had a year's maternity leave—I had to return to work, and I placed him in a licensed child care setting; the Queen's Park daycare, in fact. He had an amazing caregiver, a loving, warm and reassuring-to-a-new-parent caregiver whose name is Anne Vautour.

Much later, after I had moved from Toronto to London—this is an aside—I was delighted to learn that Anne married her partner, Elaine, in 2001, and was Ontario's first legal same-sex marriage. I never had an opportunity to officially congratulate Anne on her marriage, and also to thank her for the wonderful quality of care she provided for my son.

When my second child was born in London, we faced a dilemma. We wanted a licensed child care centre that could accommodate both children—my son was in JK at the time, and my daughter was a toddler—but nothing

was available. We were able to find an unlicensed home child care provider right in my neighbourhood who turned out to be absolutely wonderful. She was a warm and loving caregiver who welcomed my children into her home, and it was a wonderful experience for a parent. Her son was the same age as my son. She walked the two boys to JK, and the two boys formed a friendship that remains to this day. In fact, our two families have remained close 20 years later.

So I have nothing but positive things to say, from a personal perspective, about both these experiences, and I know that many people in London and across the province have shared similar positive experiences. There are many, many home child care providers who are warm and welcoming with the children in their care. They take their responsibility seriously to engage in professional development activities, they provide nutritious snacks and opportunities for safe outdoor play, and organize stimulating activities for the children they care for.

Sadly, Speaker, this is not the case for all unlicensed home child care providers, nor is it the case even for licensed child care centres. Many of these centres face challenges recruiting highly qualified early childhood educators because of the low wages the sector is able to offer because of provincial underfunding.

Given this reality, the reason that New Democrats will not be able to support this motion is that the word "quality" does not appear anywhere in this motion. The motion says nothing about the quality of child care, which has to be our first obligation—our absolute top priority—as legislators. Children need secure, consistent, sensitive, stimulating and rewarding child care environments, and parents have the right to expect that government will do everything possible to ensure high standards of care.

Speaker, we need to look at what the research tells us and what the evidence says about the best way to provide the highest standards of care. Experts agree that ensuring high standards of care, as well as ensuring accessibility and affordability, means establishing a publicly funded child care system.

If we are serious about ensuring child care quality, if we're serious about ensuring access and affordability, we should be debating today how to move forward on a high-quality publicly funded system of child care instead of this tinkering-around-the-edges kind of motion from the PCs.

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In closing, I wanted to remind MPPs that just 10 days ago, on April 20, 2015, Ontario observed Equal Pay Day, the day that marks how much further into the next year a woman has to work in order to earn the salary that a man earned the year before. There are many factors that contribute to the gender wage gap, but one that is indisputable is that a lack of access to affordable, high-quality child care creates significant barriers to women's participation in the workforce and therefore exacerbates that gender pay gap. When you have a predominantly female child care workforce that is undervalued and

seriously underpaid, the gender wage gap is made wider still.

Not only would a publicly funded system of child care provide enormous benefits for children and families, but it would have an immediate and direct impact on closing the gender wage gap.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to be able to rise and respond to the motion from the member from Nepean—Carleton.

I know the member is very passionate about child care and about children. She was a trailblazer in this place in ensuring that those of us who have young children are able to be home more often and spend some more quality time with our kids, as I do with my five-year-old. So I do respect very much her intentions on this file. However, I disagree with the narrative that she brings forward.

The steps taken by this government over the last decade have dramatically increased the number of child care spaces throughout this province by some 70%. Just yesterday, the Minister of Education announced an additional \$120 million over three years for more child care for preschoolers—a significant new investment.

I know that the member from Nepean—Carleton seeks to have more input, more dialogue about issues around early childhood care, but the minister has posted the regulations to support the Child Care and Early Years Act. They're online. They're open for public consultation, so there is the opportunity for the public to respond to those.

The minister has also struck an advisory panel, broadly based, to have that dialogue about how to best implement this act. The measures are in place by this government to have a good dialogue about how we can ensure good child care for our most vulnerable young people.

When the member opposite claims that there will be a dramatic loss in the number of child care spaces throughout the province, I reject that premise. What this government is doing is actually trying to ensure that we have more quality and safe spaces for young children.

As the member from London West spoke about quality, the other issue that I believe is missing in the member's motion here is safety. This is what has been very much a driver in the initiative of the government in this regard, not just to increase the number of child care spaces, but to ensure the safety of the children in those spaces. There is nothing more important than the government ensuring the safety of children in child care, whether it be in a school, in an institutional environment or in a home-based environment.

The rules that are being proposed around unlicensed daycares, home-based daycares, allowing them to continue to be able to operate, but in a way that guarantees the safety of children—those are very important steps that have been taken by this government to address some very serious incidents that, unfortunately, occurred over the last few years.

As a parent who has had a child in daycare, has interviewed home-based daycares looking for what would be the best fit for my child, I can tell you that my wife and I were always very concerned about what we saw with home-based daycares. We weren't certain that the same protections were in place as are with other types of daycare.

The legislation that has been brought forward, I think, will address that. It would make my family more secure in moving forward in that direction, if we had another child that needed that kind of care, because that guarantees quality and safety.

I won't be supporting this motion, because I think the government has put in place those steps that the member is actually seeking, and this is about a narrative that I completely disagree with.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakubuski: I will be supporting this motion, and I appreciate the member from Nepean—Carleton bringing it forward. She's always been a tremendous champion for offering choice in daycare and that's important, particularly to us in rural Ontario.

You may have heard me speaking about rural Ontario in the past, maybe even today. But I want to just relate some of our own experiences. I say with all due respect to the member from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, his comments about home-based daycare are insulting to so many of those people who provide unbelievably compassionate and genuinely loving care to children in their homes. Our children were recipients of that, from our next door neighbours, Georgine and Carl Lorbetskie. We could have never asked for more from a home daycare provider than what our children received from Georgine. So when the member puts everybody into that pool, I'm disappointed.

This is about choice. We would have never been able to find a licensed daycare for our kids in rural Ontario. It's the same challenge that our daughter is having today living in Whitby, Ontario, where it's just impossible. On many occasions, on short notice, do you know who the daycare provider is?

Interjection: John Yakubuski?

Mr. John Yakubuski: No, it's not often John Yakubuski, but it's somebody that lives with him. My wife ends up, on short notice, having to take care of the kids because there's nothing available.

This resolution actually speaks to that to ensure we have quality daycare available. Yes, there have been incidents, but there have been incidents at licensed daycares too. All of a sudden, we think that we can somehow regulate everything in this world, that it's all going to be fine. You have to look at the individuals. I'm going to tell you, I wouldn't trade where our kids received their daycare for a licensed daycare for—as they say—all the tea in China. Never. We had the best. I thank Georgine Lorbetskie for that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I appreciate the fact that this motion is before us. I think that we actually should be talking about child care more in the province of Ontario.

It's interesting though, just to take a step back and think about where we came from with regard to Bill 10. There were some heated debates about this issue—as they should be.

When the bill was first brought forward, it was responding to the changing landscape, if you will, of child care. When child care came under the Ministry of Education, following years, really, of an underfunded, destabilized system of child care in the province, most people thought this was going to be a really good thing. People thought, “Okay, well, if it's under the Ministry of Education, then they can't ignore it.” Of course, we've seen that based on the lack of inspections on licensed and non-licensed child care in the province of Ontario, that this is still a very systemic issue of oversight over early learning and care facilities—be they home care or licensed not-for-profits.

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We shouldn't forget, as well, that there's been a huge infusion of for-profit, big box child care because the government left a gap, and that gap—so for-profit companies look at Ontario like they could just come to the trough because, quite honestly, they still have access to subsidies, which is ridiculous because they're making money off of cutting the quality factors of child care. I think that's really where we want to focus our attention: What are the benchmarks for quality child care? Invariably, the quality of care comes down to the quality of the caregiver, and that's also tied to training and professional development and the safety of those sites as well.

Also, more and more we're talking about inclusivity as it relates to child care. Still, in the province of Ontario, if you have a disabled child, finding accessible, affordable, quality-based child care is a huge challenge—just a huge challenge. What a missed opportunity, one at the federal level—which I'm sure my Liberal friends and colleagues will agree. When they brought in this so-called choice in child care, this \$100 a month for parents, they had the craziest plan at the time, that if the dry-cleaner and then the shoe store in a strip mall thought they could get together—if those employees had some kids, they could get together and maybe rent some space and create a child care. Of course, no spaces were created like that because that's not how child care works. Certainly, it is not the way that it should work. But for parents to receive \$100 a month really doesn't expand their choice in child care because those options just don't exist.

I go back to the comments of my friend from London West. We both come from education so we do know the value of investing early in the life of a child. The return on investment is huge. The Centre for Spatial Economics actually did an assessment that for every dollar you invest in child care in the economy, in educational and health benefits, the social determinants of health—the investment is there. The research is there. This is why public policy should be based on evidence and research.

Unfortunately, though, there are still people on that side of the House who think that full-day kindergarten is child care. It is not. People do not work from 9 until 3. When Charles Pascal advised the government of the day, of Dalton McGuinty, he proposed a community hub in schools: that you build services where the children are, which is in the schools. This would address the issue that my friend here has said about the lack of rural child care spaces, because there are schools there, although they're becoming fewer and fewer. It's hard to create community hubs when the schools are closing. But what a missed opportunity. Ottawa and Waterloo did build the original design around a community hub school, and in Waterloo we've created almost 2,000 child care spaces at no cost to the taxpayer because it's a not-for-profit model. It's fee-based. Those fees keep going down because the more people that come into the schools, it lowers the cost. It actually truly will be, one day, the most accessible region for child care.

I go back to the main concern with this motion: that it addresses accessibility, which is some options; it addresses affordability in some regards, but it doesn't address quality. What we should all be focused on in this House is building a system of care which has children at the centre and has supports built around them, but at every turn, every dollar invested is reinvested back into the quality of care that that child is receiving.

I think that if we had that vision and if actually we worked together, we could create a system of early learning and care in the province of Ontario which truly would be second to none in the country of Canada.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Han Dong: I'm very pleased to speak to this motion brought forward by the honourable member from Nepean—Carleton.

As a parent, I heard the comment made by the member from Kitchener—Waterloo with regard to full-day kindergarten. Both of my kids benefited from full-day kindergarten. I can tell you: It works. They learned a lot of stuff at full-day kindergarten. So I do agree with the notion that it's not just a daycare; it's a school. It's an early learning strategy that this government put forward.

When I read this motion, which talks about accessibility and affordability of child care, I can't help but go back to 2003, when we were first given the privilege to govern in this province. We had to deal with a deficit. It was a hidden deficit, though. Just so you know—I just want to remind the House; I know that you know this—since then we passed a law that no future government can hide any deficit.

But we entered a very serious social deficit as well. There had been serious downloading of previously provincial services to municipalities. In the last 12 years, we've seen clawbacks on child care from the federal government. I would love to see a comprehensive federal child care strategy, which we haven't seen.

We have stepped up to the plate to compensate for some of the deficits that the previous government left us.

Especially when the federal government came forward and clawed back on the child care strategies that were introduced by the previous federal government, we stepped up to the plate. I think it was \$72 million that we had to fork out during those years.

I want to point out Bill 10, which we passed. Once proclaimed, it will help to increase the availability of licensed child care, and even more, will provide additional incentive for home-based providers to join the licensed sector. So it's clear that we're not against anyone in the industry. We just want to make sure that the quality of service and the safety of the service is available to every Ontarian who needs it.

As a parent and as an MPP, a representative of a great riding in downtown Toronto, I think it's important for me to stand up and speak up for the kids and parents who are in need of this service.

I want to make clear again that the government recognized the role of unlicensed child care providers. With Bill 10 being passed, once proclaimed this act will continue to permit unlicensed child care providers to care for our children. I think that's a very good, very thoughtful measure in the act. For that reason I feel it is adequate, and I feel that I can't support this motion because it does not address the issues of quality, availability and accessibility.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I hope the member from Nepean-Carleton is feeling a little bit better soon. She managed to give her talk on a sprained ankle. Keep your leg elevated.

I just want to mention that I hear the struggle between rural ridings and urban ridings here in the House. Do you know the expression, "Walk a mile in my shoes"? I think it's very hard for us, in downtown Toronto, to imagine what it's like in a small community. It doesn't have to be a rural community; it can just be a small community. In many small communities, there are not enough children for a large licensed daycare. It could be that there is a fair number of people in the population but not that many babies. All of a sudden, there is an influx of kids over a couple of years, and then it disappears again. You need to have a big centre with a large population to have the licensed, regulated, large centres we think about when we think about large daycare centres here in Toronto.

It shouldn't be a struggle between large daycare centres—which, I might mention, are unionized centres, and is possibly why they have a stronger voice than smaller centres that are just struggling to take care of their families and take care of the neighbourhood families.

I think we have to focus on the fact that there is also the issue of choice. These home daycare centres are an extension of people's families. It's not just an industrial setting. It's a small setting, and very often there's flexibility in terms of when you pick up your kid and when you drop off the child.

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With the traffic in an urban centre, or with the distance travelled, and with our winter storms and tough weather

conditions, many families need and want those kinds of flexible hours that a home daycare can provide, that a large institutionalized—as I'll call it—daycare cannot provide.

Many people work flexible hours. They're in sales. They're often single parents. They don't have family nearby to help out and pick up kids or drop off kids. I think that, if we want to have a workforce so that we can kick-start our economy, then we have to help out those parents who need to have somebody available to look after their kids.

I was at the social policy committee, and I heard over and over from stakeholders that Bill 10 is going to dramatically reduce the ability for home daycares to provide child care. We heard that by having all-day kindergarten—even though a lot of families count on it and love it, the fact is that it reduced children from daycare settings. Proportionally, it reduced kids from the larger centres, which often don't take kids under 18 months. Most parents have to return to the workforce before the child is 18 months old. I haven't heard what this government is suggesting, in terms of providing daycare availability to those children who are under 18 months and need a daycare.

I don't hear this government providing solutions for special-needs kids—who need to be in a smaller setting, in a home-like setting—with physical challenges, with emotional challenges. I don't hear this government offering solutions for families who have transit issues. Most large daycare centres are not accessible for families who don't have cars or transit nearby. The small home daycare settings are often within communities. It encourages walking, it encourages a healthy lifestyle and it also encourages communities to get to know each other and to work better as a community.

We all know of people who send their kids to schools with specialized programming, or possibly independent schools. If your children are travelling a long distance to get to that school, chances are that they're not meeting children in their own neighbourhood. That's a struggle for many families. If families are sending their kids to independent faith-based schools—which I have a lot of in my riding—Bill 10 is actually going to restrict those schools to be able to provide preschool programming and nursery programming.

Maybe some of these consequences are unintended, but they are consequences nevertheless, and I haven't heard this government adequately explain and offer solutions for some of these consequences.

I'd like to see some discussion on unlicensed versus illegal. These home daycare centres might not be licensed, but they are perfectly legal centres. In my riding—in fact, walking distance from my house—a little girl, Eva Ravikovich, died in an illegal home daycare that was reported on. There were two or three reports to the ministry, and they weren't even acted on. Two of the reports were not acted on. Now we see a \$3.5-million lawsuit against the owners and operators, of course, but also against the Ministry of Education. If this case is

settled and the court decides that the Ministry of Education is liable, it's the taxpayers who are on the hook.

Are we going to see a real concerted effort to make daycares safer for our children, instead of just reducing choice and taking parental rights away from parents?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I am proud to rise today to discuss an issue that is important to me but also for the constituents of Ottawa-Orléans.

This government, on this side of the House, since 2003, has committed to ensuring that all Ontarian families have the ability to ensure that their children get the best care and the best education available than almost any other jurisdiction in the world. We should be proud of this.

The member opposite's motion, which I believe we have addressed in the House through Bill 10, the Child Care Modernization Act—lorsque nous avons présenté le projet de loi 10, nous reconnaissons que nous devrions réétudier et revoir le système de garde en Ontario.

Tragedies had arisen from certain sectors of the child care industry, and this government and all members would agree that we in the chamber have a higher level of duty to our youth and our children. That's why, actually, we brought forward the Child Care Modernization Act, which, after debate in this session and last session, was passed with considerable say from all sides of the House and numerous stakeholders.

Nous reconnaissons l'importance du rôle joué en Ontario par les services de garde sans licence et de l'importance qu'ils ont comme une option pour les familles.

Realizing that many sectors of child care have not been updated—in some cases, the regulations have not been updated in more than half a century—we needed to establish a modern framework that kept our children safe but allowed the flexibility of unlicensed daycare to still serve the public. We've respected the invaluable work that unlicensed child care operators provide, while making sure that our children are safely looked after and receiving the appropriate amount of attention they need.

Our new child care legislation has had years of input, and we've gone to considerable lengths to make our updated frameworks and regulations balance.

Ma collègue à l'opposition propose une bonne motion, mais sans valeur, puisque nous adressons ces points à l'intérieur du projet de loi 10.

She has motioned that the Child Care Modernization Act should allow flexibility for independent child care providers. We've done that, and done it with considerable input.

Again, the member opposite has also motioned "that the regulatory regime allows for a fairer distribution of inspectors to child care case files." Yet again, we've done this. We have made sure that our inspectors are on the cases that need it, and those who violate regulations within the act are the ones who garner the extra attention,

while we do not needlessly disturb the good work of those who obey the law.

I rise today in support of our Bill 10. I hope that all members understand today the hard work this government has done in addressing those concerns, and therefore will not be supporting the motion of the opposition.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand in support of my colleague from Nepean-Carleton. She has put a lot of thought into this particular situation, and she has reached out to a number of individuals who have been negatively impacted by the bill that came through last session, Bill 10. In particular, I appreciate the fact that she, again, consults. This is something that we're seeing less and less of from this government. I could go on with many examples, such as neonics and carbon tax, but I want to focus in on something that's very important to this particular motion that my friend from Nepean-Carleton has presented.

Essentially, the coalition of Child Care Providers Resource Network agrees with the proposed regulation to remove the requirement to care for a minimum of three children under the age of three years. IPCs have been caring for more than three children under the age of three for years—very successfully, I might add, in terms of safe, high-quality, age-appropriate programs. But the limit of two children under the age of two is already causing parents and caregivers problems. They're seeing parents and caregivers literally in tears.

A caregiver recently contacted the CCPRN, stating that she turned away three one-year-olds the previous day. She said that one of the moms actually burst into tears and stated that she didn't know what she was going to do, as she had to start work the next month. The coalition of Child Care Providers Resource Network is suggesting that we're going to see more and more of this angst in the months to come.

I just want to share a personal perspective, that independent caregivers typically become members of the family. When my husband was the primary caregiver for my three stepkids, two of the three of them were not in school. If it wasn't for Mary and if it wasn't for Audrey and if it wasn't for his sister Elaine, he wouldn't have been able to confidently go to work every day, knowing that his children were being well cared for. This particular motion takes that into consideration.

1620

For that, I thank the member from Nepean-Carleton because we need to take into consideration that in rural Ontario our conditions are very, very different. An individual may not have the resources or time to drive 20 minutes out of their village, off their farm, to get their kid to a registered daycare and then turn around to drive in the opposite direction to get to work. They have totally, yet again, shown their disconnect with rural, northern and suburban Ontario when it comes to daycare and quality care across this province.

There are also unintended consequences as well to what the Liberals have set up. In terms of Bill 10, we're

seeing in the province of Ontario that some school boards have essentially frozen out independent providers, causing uncertain futures for these small businesses—yet again, another example of the Liberal government's total disregard for small business across this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Nepean–Carleton. You have two minutes for a response.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to respond to the debate today. I'm very happy that we had it. In fact, I'd like to have more debates on child care quality, accessibility and affordability in the province of Ontario.

I would like to say thank you to the members from London West and Kitchener–Waterloo. I know we fundamentally and philosophically disagree on a number of things in this House but I think at the end of the day I appreciated the respectful tone in which you chose to debate, and I appreciate the fact that I might not necessarily accept the fact that we disagree, but you do have a point of view, and I respect it.

To the members from Trinity–Spadina, Ottawa–Orléans and Etobicoke–Lakeshore, thank you for joining in the debate. I must admit I was quite disappointed that the Liberals on the one hand were saying that they're addressing the challenges that I'm asking to be addressed, and then on the other hand saying that they don't need to be. I think that if we could have an adult conversation—you are impacting people's lives; you're impacting parental choice. I think it would behoove the government to actually act like adults here and not be partisan. Unfortunately, I guess we aren't going to see this motion pass, but I want to say to the people that I represent and to those who had their hats hanging on this motion and its success, I'm very sorry.

To my colleagues the members from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Thornhill and Huron–Bruce, I really appreciate your kind words today. I think you all understand the challenges that fast-growing areas face—Gila Martow and I represent very fast-growing areas in Ontario—as well as two rural members bringing forward the challenges for child care in their respective communities. I really appreciate that they brought this forward and I'm grateful that they had this conversation.

To those who are watching at home: The fight is not over. I have been talking about this issue since 2006 in this assembly, and I can tell you, with the rest of the three-year mandate I have in this House, you'll be hearing a lot more on choice in child care from me, as the member from Nepean–Carleton.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 46, standing in the name of Mrs. Mangat.

Mrs. Mangat has moved private member's notice of motion number 45. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We'll take the vote at the end of private members' business.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I already ruled. Order.

GASOLINE TAX FAIRNESS FOR ALL ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ POUR TOUS À L'ÉGARD DE LA TAXE SUR L'ESSENCE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Yakabuski has moved second reading of Bill 59, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to matching rebates of gasoline tax that the Minister provides to municipalities.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We'll take the vote at the end of private members' business.

CHILD CARE

SERVICES DE GARDE D'ENFANTS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. MacLeod has moved private member's notice of motion number 44. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it. I declare the motion lost.

Motion negated.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1626 to 1631.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mrs. Mangat has moved private member's notice of motion number 45.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Anderson, Granville

Fife, Catherine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

McMeekin, Ted
Milczyn, Peter Z.

Baker, Yvan
Ballard, Chris
Bradley, James J.
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad

Hoggarth, Ann
Hoskins, Eric
Hunter, Mitzie
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor

Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Sattler, Peggy
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 12; the nays are 40.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING ONTARIO UP ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2015

LOI DE 2015 POUR FAVORISER L'ESSOR DE L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Fedeli, Victor
Harris, Michael
Hudak, Tim

Jones, Sylvia
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
Martow, Gila

Scott, Laurie
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Yakubski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 40; the nays are 12.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Open the doors.

Close the doors.

GASOLINE TAX FAIRNESS FOR ALL ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ POUR TOUS À L'ÉGARD DE LA TAXE SUR L'ESSENCE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Yakubski has moved second reading of Bill 59, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to matching rebates of gasoline tax that the Minister provides to municipalities.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Fedeli, Victor
Harris, Michael
Hudak, Tim

Jones, Sylvia
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
Martow, Gila

Scott, Laurie
Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Yakubski, John

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Albanese, Laura
Anderson, Granville
Baker, Yvan
Ballard, Chris
Bradley, James J.
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad

Fife, Catherine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Hoggarth, Ann
Hoskins, Eric
Hunter, Mitzie
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor

McMeekin, Ted
Milczyn, Peter Z.
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Shafiq
Sandals, Liz
Sattler, Peggy
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo
Zimmer, David

Mr. Sousa moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 91, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 91, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Sousa.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the wonderful member from York South-Weston.

I am pleased to stand today in this House and support the second reading of Bill 91, the Building Ontario Up Act (Budget Measures), 2015. This bill is the result of consultations with many Ontarians. Through direct talks and town hall meetings and telephone town hall meetings, as well as through our Budget Talks website, Ontarians have spoken, and we have listened.

Bill 91, which, if passed, will be known as the Building Ontario Up Act (Budget Measures), 2015, outlines our government's plan to address the needs of Ontarians now and to build Ontario up for a strong and prosperous future.

We are accomplishing this, Mr. Speaker. Our government's plan to create jobs and promote more growth has four major pillars. We're being disciplined, to control spending, and determined to return to balance by 2017-18.

First, we will build modern infrastructure, because today, one of the biggest barriers to creating more jobs and fostering greater growth in our province is congestion. Our roads and highways are filled with parts that need to get to manufacturing plants; products that need to get to market; and people who need to get to work. But today, congestion is costing and choking our potential.

Gridlock costs our economy up to \$11 billion per year in the GTHA alone, yet government after government has delayed investing in infrastructure. We can't afford any more delays. We must build. Ontario must build.

That's why our long-term plan calls for investments of more than \$130 billion in public infrastructure over 10 years. This includes dedicating \$31.5 billion over 10 years for public transit, transportation and priority infra-

structure right across the province, under our Moving Ontario Forward plan.

To help in part to make these investments, Mr. Speaker, we're also taking steps to unlock the value of some of our provincial assets. We're following the recommendations of the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets to help create jobs and growth for tomorrow.

1640

First, we're modernizing Ontario's distribution and sale of beer, improving choice and maintaining our commitment to social responsibility in the process. For the first time in history, Ontario would permit the sale of beer in grocery stores. We are doing this while taking the necessary steps to mandate in law social responsibility measures to ensure the safe sale of alcohol. It's the biggest change in alcohol distribution and sale since prohibition.

Second, we're proposing to broaden the ownership of Hydro One through an initial public offering that will unlock billions in value for the benefit of Ontarians. We will do so while protecting the public interest. Following the IPO, the Ontario government would remain the largest shareholder and is proposing, by law, that no other shareholder or group of shareholders be permitted to own more than 10%. Most importantly, the new Hydro One will not set rates for consumers. This will continue to be the job of the independent regulator, the Ontario Energy Board. By broadening the ownership in Hydro One, we will invest billions of dollars more in critically needed infrastructure that will fuel our economy.

The second part of our plan is to invest in our talent and skills. We know that a well-educated workforce is a competitive workforce. This government has been making the right investments to ensure Ontario's competitiveness. Today, there are 130,000 more Ontario children in licensed child care than in 2003. We've raised the wages of child care workers, invested in full-day kindergarten and lowered class sizes. Now we're providing more than \$11 billion over 10 years to build new schools and improve existing school facilities. I'm proud to say that we've seen results, Mr. Speaker. Today, more kids are meeting or exceeding provincial standards. More kids are graduating from high school and more adults have a post-secondary credential.

We're making it easier to pay for post-secondary education as well. Last year, we provided more than \$1.3 billion in grants and loans, and helped more than 380,000 students achieve their dreams of post-secondary education.

We're investing in skilled trades to support more than 28,000 Ontarians who registered for apprenticeships last year.

I'm proud to say that we're also renewing Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy by investing an additional \$250 million over the next two years. That will bring our total investment in youth employment programs to more than \$565 million over the next two years to help young people get that first job, find a mentor or start their own business.

This government recognizes the value and the need to continue to help our young people get the education and skills training that they need. That's why we're also supporting the apprenticeship system through an additional \$55 million invested over the next two years. This will enhance in-class apprenticeships and training and support programs that will help develop job skills and readiness to find work as apprentices. Investing in talent and skills is helping to ensure we have the workers we want and need for continued economic growth.

The third part of our plan for growth is to help create an environment where businesses can be more competitive. It is worth noting that Ontario's combined federal-provincial general corporate income tax rate is lower than the comparable tax rate in every US state. This has also been an attraction for investors. Ontario is the top destination for foreign direct investment in North America as a result. That means more jobs, more economic growth and a better standard of living for all of us.

But there is more to do. We launched our 10-year, \$2.5-billion Jobs and Prosperity Fund to partner with Ontario companies to increase productivity, innovate and export. We're enhancing the Jobs and Prosperity Fund by an additional \$200 million to attract even more business, more investment and create more jobs. It's not about more government; it's about more opportunity, recognizing that businesses create those jobs.

Also, for the first time, we're making the forestry sector eligible for support through this program. We will extend the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program. This ongoing and annual investment of \$120 million will help Ontario's large northern industries reduce energy costs and increase their competitiveness.

We will also establish a new innovation initiative which will bring together senior business leaders to find ways to help scale up Ontario start-ups.

We also will continue to cut red tape. Since 2008, we have eliminated 17% of all regulatory requirements. These were regulations that were getting in the way of people's businesses growing.

Our fourth pillar is ensuring that everyone has a secure retirement. That's why we have introduced the Ontario pension plan to help ensure that all Ontarians can retire securely. Retirement security is a necessary part of keeping our economy strong. The reward for a lifetime of contributing to the economy should not be financial insecurity at retirement.

More than half of all Ontarians unfortunately do not have a workplace pension. Too many are at risk of not saving enough. Low retirement savings put everyday people at risk, and the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, or ORPP, like health care and great schools, would be a way to add to our strategic advantage by attracting and retaining the talented workforce that businesses need.

We're moving forward by proposing the creation of the ORPP's administrative body in this budget. This initiative would further enhance retirement security and help sustain economic prosperity for years to come.

I've spoken of the four pillars of our government's plan to build Ontario up, but to continue with the

analogy, all four pillars are underpinned by strong financial management. This government continues to surpass its fiscal targets year after year after year. We are now projecting a deficit of \$8.5 billion in 2015-16, and when achieved, it will be the lowest since the onset of the global recession. We project a deficit of \$4.8 billion in 2016-17 and a return to balance by 2017-18.

We're doing this by holding the line on spending and making sure that every dollar counts. The year 2014-15 marks the sixth year in a row that program spending is expected to be lower than forecast.

In addition, over the past four years, the province has held average annual growth in program spending to 1.5% below CPI. We did so without cutting critical services. We controlled spending not by slashing and burning, as some would do; we did it by closely examining programs. We introduced a new multi-year planning and allocation process, and we're looking across government to achieve better value for your money.

Our approach is working. We have the lowest rate of per capita program spending of any provincial government in Canada, while keeping health care, education and social services strong. This coming year, we will do even more. We will revamp the way we purchase, dispense and bill drugs under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program, saving Ontarians over \$200 million per year. We'll make our business tax supports more focused and effective as well, saving another \$165 million per year by 2017-18. And we're holding the line on public sector compensation, with net-zero agreements to find savings in the system to support our fiscal balance. There is no new funding for compensation increases unless savings are found to offset them.

In conclusion, Bill 91, the Building Ontario Up Act (Budget Measures), 2015, continues this government's plan and reinforces what we have to do to get to balance. It invests in modern public infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and transit; it creates an innovative and dynamic business environment; it invests in people's skills and talents; and it builds a strong and secure retirement income system. We have a sound, prudent plan to balance without harming our economic recovery, and more importantly, bolster the livelihood of Ontarians.

That is why I ask the members of this assembly to support Bill 91, the Building Ontario Up Act (Budget Measures), 2015. Together, we will build Ontario up by making investments that grow the economy and create jobs.

Now I turn it over to the next. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for York South-Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you to the minister. I am pleased to have the opportunity to stand today and add my support for second reading of Bill 91, the Building Ontario Up Act (Budget Measures), 2015. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the budget measures bill contains a wide variety of initiatives and amendments. I am happy to speak in detail about a few of them.

Of great interest to many Ontarians has been our plan to reform beverage alcohol sales in the province. Bill 91

contains a proposal that would enable the province to expand beer sales to up to an additional 450 retail locations, including grocery stores, across the province. This would mark the biggest change in the way beverage alcohol is sold in Ontario since the repeal of Prohibition.

1650

If passed, this bill would allow more convenience and choice for Ontarians, while maintaining a strong commitment to social responsibility. To put this into numbers that people can understand, expanding the sale of beer by up to 450 more locations is roughly equal to the existing number of Beer Store outlets and is in addition to the more than 600 LCBO stores across the province.

Bill 91 doesn't stop there, though. The Ontario government is finalizing a new beer framework agreement with the Beer Store that will return the framework closer to its original co-operative roots, opening up ownership to small and craft brewers; create a new craft category to better profile craft beer; extend the Beer Store's role in the successful delivery of the Ontario deposit return program beyond 2017; and change retailing and marketing practices to ensure fairness and equity for all brewers.

It also proposes an additional \$100 million a year in revenues to be generated for the province, phased in over four years. If passed, Bill 91 would permit these changes to be implemented.

I am pleased to note that the industry's largest brewers have separately committed to comply with the government's request that they cap their price increases to no more than the rate of inflation for some of their most popular beer products until May 2017, unless there are material changes to the industry. Let me assure you, Mr. Speaker, and, indeed, all the members of the Legislature, that the government will continue to uphold the principles of social responsibility by mandating in law strict controls over how beer is sold in these new locations.

For example, the province would ensure that the sale of alcohol is restricted to set hours, that it is in a designated section of each store and that all staff selling alcohol in grocery stores are properly certified and fully trained to ensure Ontario's standards for social responsibility are met.

Let me be clear: Ontarians will pay the same price for the same beer regardless of where it is sold. Under Ontario's uniform pricing policy, the beer price that is set by the brewer is the price that the consumer pays whether the product is sold in the LCBO store, the Beer Store, the brewer's own on-site store or, now, in a grocery store.

The Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets will continue to refine its recommendations on how to maximize the value in the beverage alcohol retailing sector, including how to modernize the sales of wine and spirits.

Bill 91, the Building Ontario Up Act, 2015, has more positive changes than this for Ontarians. Ontario's moving ahead with its plan to unlock the value of certain public assets to help support unprecedented investments in transit, transportation and other priority infrastructure projects through the Moving Ontario Forward plan.

Moving Ontario Forward is part of the government's plan to invest more than \$130 billion over 10 years in public infrastructure, representing the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history.

These changes, following recommendations from the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets chaired by Ed Clark and subject to approval by this Legislature of Bill 91, would strengthen the economy, create thousands of jobs and generate an estimated about \$4 billion, subject to market conditions, that would be set aside for infrastructure investments.

In order to generate value for the people of Ontario, the government intends to broaden the ownership of Hydro One, starting with an initial public offering, an IPO, later in 2015-16. Following the IPO, the Ontario government would remain the largest shareholder, and, by proposed law, no other shareholder or group of shareholders would be permitted to own more than 10%. The opportunity to buy into Hydro One would be made available in stages in order to maximize return to taxpayers.

Bill 91 would also make sure consumers are protected. As currently is the case, Hydro One does not set the rates for consumers. Rates would continue to be set by the independent regulator, the Ontario Energy Board, OEB. The government also intends to strengthen the regulatory and enforcement powers of the OEB to protect ratepayers.

If passed, Bill 91 would enable net proceeds from broadening Hydro One's ownership to go to the Trillium Trust and be used to fund transit, transportation and other priority infrastructure projects across the province.

As highlighted by the Minister of Finance, we must build the roads, the bridges and the transit that a 21st-century economy needs to make sure Ontario continues to grow and to produce jobs. When Ontario invests, it is building, and when it is building, it is growing.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, our Moving Ontario Forward plan, first announced in the 2014 Ontario budget, called for making nearly \$29 billion available over 10 years for public transit, highways and other priority infrastructure projects in the province. These infrastructure investments will help address congestion and keep people and goods moving. Studies show that congestion in the GTHA alone costs Ontario's economy between \$6 billion and \$11 billion a year. I am pleased to state that higher-targeted revenues from assets mean that there will be an additional \$2.6 billion in Moving Ontario Forward funding available, for a total of \$31.5 billion in dedicated funds available over 10 years.

All told, investments made through the Moving Ontario Forward plan are expected to support over 20,000 jobs per year, on average, in construction and related industries. These investments will have a positive impact throughout Ontario. They will further improve GO train service, for example. Our regional express rail plan will mean more trains, more trips and faster service—electrified service on many of these corridors. It will mean GO trains running every 15 minutes in core

areas. It will mean two-way, all-day service on weekdays, evenings and weekends in core areas. It will mean enhancing the GO network, making it faster and easier for Ontarians to get around, more than ever before.

But these investments are not just being made in the GTHA; these investments will mean new and renewed infrastructure across Ontario. Through Moving Ontario Forward, we will invest about \$16 billion in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area and about \$15 billion elsewhere in Ontario. For example, we will be investing \$100 million annually to help small, rural and northern communities build and repair critical infrastructure and create jobs across Ontario. We are making highway improvements between communities, like widening Highway 11 and 17 between Thunder Bay and Nipigon, and building a new alignment of Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph. I was speaking to my colleague the member from Ajax, who told me about the new Highway 418 between Ajax and Durham that is going up.

These investments will improve connections within and between communities, allowing goods and people to move freely. All of this supports a strong economy with growth and with jobs. We know that renewing and expanding public infrastructure supports Ontario's industries, creates jobs and provides long-term benefits to Ontarians and to the economy. That is why investing in infrastructure is the key pillar of the government's plan for Ontario.

This bill, through its ongoing and planned investments, furthers this government's plan for the renewal and expansion of transportation and other priority infrastructure. Over the last decade, the province has made unprecedented investments in infrastructure, supporting mobility and economic growth.

Bill 91, the Building Ontario Up Act (Budget Measures), 2015, ensures that we continue to build Ontario up by investing in our future. That is why I ask for the support of this House in passing this really important legislation for everyone.

1700

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I rise today to speak on the comments made by both the Minister of Finance and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

They introduced a budget; they're still trying to tell the people of Ontario they're going to balance the books by 2017-18. We know that sounds pretty much impossible. It's not just me saying it. The rating agencies are looking closer. The banks have said it's impossible. In fact, instead of bringing the deficit down, which is what one would think you would do—bring the deficit down in order to balance by 2017-18—you actually increased from \$10.5 billion to \$10.9 billion. The debt is increasing. It's going to be increased by \$14.7 billion. I know it's a lot of numbers, but we're talking about the budget. Your spending is increasing by \$2.4 billion.

So I just don't understand how you're going to be able to actually balance the books by 2017-18. In fact, the

largest-growing thing is the interest on the debt, which is the highest growth area. It's an average annual increase of 5.7%. When paying off the interest on the money borrowed is the third-largest budget item, you're in trouble. You've got health care, education and what you're spending to pay interest on the money you've borrowed. The province of Ontario is in a critical situation.

You see that especially in the health care sector. You see nurses being laid off across the province of Ontario. You cannot hear enough about how disastrous the home care system is. So what did they do? In typical Liberal fashion, they actually added another level of bureaucracy to deliver home care. That is not even practical, Mr. Speaker, and unfortunately the people of Ontario are suffering under this Liberal government's budget.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is a pleasure to speak to this bill, because it is so important. I listened closely to the Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistant, and I still can't believe how much we're talking about beer in the province of Ontario, quite honestly—the fact that we have a beer ombudsman—with all of the issues that are going on in our economy. Pretty soon, we're going to have a white wine ombudsman and a red wine ombudsman. Why not? “Look over here; there's some beer over here.” Because you certainly don't want people paying attention to the fact that you're selling off Hydro One. I cannot emphasize enough how critical this decision is for the future of the province of Ontario. Quite honestly, you're losing annualized income with this sale. You did not run on it. You have no mandate to it.

But today, when ACTRA was here and we were talking about protecting child performers, it was really interesting because the Minister of Finance was talking about job creation. The revenue side of job creation in this budget is almost non-existent, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to give you an example of one of the ways this budget actually is going to cut jobs in Toronto.

Let's just focus on Toronto for a second. FilmOntario is already in the process of looking at investment in the city. Film productions are happening across the province and in downtown Toronto. On page 342 of the budget, you are cutting tax credits to incentivize investment in film production in the province of Ontario—and you're doing it mid-year. What ACTRA told me today is that people are already losing their jobs. Those jobs are already going. When you think of the economic value of the film industry to job creation, when a production comes into town, they eat at restaurants, they rent cars, they stay at hotels, they take taxis. It is an economic driver. It's a success. Why would you undermine a successful job creation strategy? You cannot afford to lose any more good jobs in the province of Ontario, so you should at least defer this tax credit cut. You should if you care about the people of Toronto.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I want to thank the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock and the member from Kitchener-Waterloo for their comments.

I want to tell you that, in my opinion, this budget and Bill 91, the Building Ontario Up Act, is probably one of the most important budgets that this government is moving forward. This budget not only looks at the days and weeks and months ahead, but also at the decade ahead. It builds for us through infrastructure, through planned investments and yet at the same time will be on track to balance the budget.

As we know, the budget deficit for the year 2015-16 is forecast to be \$8.5 billion. That's the lowest deficit forecast since the onset of the global recession. That means we're on track. It also means that we're on track for the next few years. The Minister of Finance has told us that in the year 2016-17 that deficit will come down to \$4.8 billion, and by 2017-18 we will have wiped out the deficit.

How are we doing this? We're using a number of tools, but we're also keeping the promises we made to the voters of Ontario. We told the voters of Ontario that we will continue to deliver the supports and services they need in order for Ontarians to live a fair and just life, and a comfortable life. We are doing that, and at the same time unlocking very important assets so that we can pay off the debt and the deficit. And yes, we're doing that by broadening the ownership of Hydro One.

Why am I saying “broadening the ownership”? Because it is not selling off Hydro One; it's broadening the ownership. Forty per cent of Hydro One will be retained by the province. The Premier has already said that she is going to start by initially offering—on the advice of people like Ed Clark, who I think really know what they're talking about, the first offering will be 15%. It allows us to retain ownership.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: That was fascinating Liberal-speak there for a while. I thought I was in an Orwellian novel.

I'm pleased to provide some comments for the Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistant. He talked about the four pillars that are in this budget motion. Indeed, there are four. I would question why they've chosen those, but we'll get into that a little further on when I have my speech.

After Thursday's budget, I was involved in a home show this past weekend, and I can tell you, to bolster the Kitchener-Conestoga member's comments about beer, that nobody was talking about beer. Nobody cared about the announcement about beer. What they care about and what they are worried about is the cost of energy: the cost of hydro, the cost of gas. Everything that relates to energy—heating homes and air-conditioning homes—has been going up consistently under this Liberal government, and they see no relief in sight. It was very disturbing to the people I spoke to at the home show in Bolton over the weekend, and it is without doubt the number one issue I am now dealing with in my constituency office.

Five years ago, I'd get one call a month, "I can't pay the hydro," or about issues with hydro. Now I'm getting them daily. People see the social experimentation that is happening with our energy. The government's inserting itself into how energy is delivered and how energy is manufactured is a real problem that is now transposing itself with the cost of hydro. I can tell you that it is making a difference in my riding, and they are concerned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for York South–Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I want to thank the members who have commented and thank them for their comments: the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, the member from Halton and the member from Dufferin–Caledon.

Mr. Speaker, I highlighted just a few of a number of initiatives and amendments that are contained in Bill 91.

I think the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock was commenting on balancing the budget. I think we're doing that through a thoughtful and fiscally responsible approach. We are on track to a balanced budget by 2017-18, and it's not only us saying that; it's the experts.

We are conducting a program review of renewal and transformation of programs. This is a fundamental new approach to multi-year planning and budgeting, using evidence to inform better choices and improve outcomes.

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We are managing the compensation costs. This is an area that needs to be addressed within Ontario's existing fiscal framework. It is very important. We need to address that, and we are doing so. There are more measures that are contained in this budget that speak to that. We're maintaining tax fairness and a level playing field for businesses. So we're enhancing auditing to address the underground economy activities and also corporate tax avoidance. Adjusting tax credit programs—and this is for the member from Kitchener–Waterloo: That's to ensure that the supports that are provided to business are effective, efficient and sustainable. That's the reason why we're doing it, but always in a thoughtful, considerate way. We're also strengthening the government's transparency and fiscal accountability. I think they're all measures that are valid and that should be supported by this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to revert back to motions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The deputy House leader has said that we have unanimous consent to revert to motions. Agreed? Agreed.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley: Speaker, I believe that you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward

a motion without notice regarding the time allocation motion on Bill 80, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The deputy government House leader has put forward a motion without notice regarding a time allocation motion on Bill 80, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I move that the order of the House dated April 22, 2015, providing for allocation of time on Bill 80, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animals for Research Act with respect to the possession and breeding of orcas and administrative requirements for animal care, be amended by deleting the second bullet point in the third paragraph and substituting the following:

That the deadline for requests to appear be 12 noon on Tuesday, May 5, 2015;

That, following the deadline, the Clerk of the Committee provide the members of the subcommittee with a list of requests to appear;

That the members of the subcommittee prioritize and return the list by 12 noon on Wednesday, May 6, 2015; and

That the Clerk of the Committee schedule witnesses from these prioritized lists.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Bradley has moved that the order of the House dated April 22—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Dispense.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Dispense? Agreed. Carried? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

BUILDING ONTARIO UP ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2015

LOI DE 2015 POUR FAVORISER L'ESSOR DE L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I understand that we have unanimous consent to stand down our lead on Bill 91.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has asked for permission to stand down her lead. Agreed? Agreed.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to take this opportunity to speak on Bill 91, the Budget Measures Act. The first point I'd like to raise is that, over the last month, my PC colleagues and I have asked this government to make commitments in five areas that we believe will make Ontario a better place to live and work.

The first ask we asked from the government was to back off implementing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, or ORPP. We also asked the government to shelve

their carbon tax proposal. We requested the government to fix home care in Ontario by dealing with the underlying issues at community care access centres across the province. The government also needed to make a firm and transparent commitment to reduce energy rates in Ontario. Lastly, we asked the government to prepare a detailed and credible plan on how they intend to balance the budget by 2017-18.

Our calls for action were ignored by this government. The Liberals' arrogance to not listen to our advice and the warning calls from experts like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Auditor General and credit rating agencies will lead to the further deterioration of Ontario's economic climate. This budget will simply do nothing to get Ontario back on a firm economic footing and balance the budget by 2017-18.

In the budget, the amount spent on the interest on the debt is the highest-growth area—higher than education, higher than health. In addition, the third-highest spending line in our province, after health care and education, is paying interest on the debt. What's worse is the fact that there is no plan to deal with the debt. The consequence of this, as noted by the Auditor General, is, it will lead to the crowding out of services, because money will need to be diverted to pay the interest. Cuts to programs and services, like nurses and other front-line health care workers—which, by the way, we've already seen—will only continue as the interest rates increase.

Speaker, I'd like to take the rest of my time to talk about the five budget asks and the rationale behind them. Once again, my PC colleagues and I asked the Ontario government to not implement the ORPP. The ORPP is nothing short of another payroll tax on businesses of all sizes. My PC colleagues and I believe the ORPP would hurt businesses and families by forcing them to save money without taking into consideration the budgets of the businesses or the families. Effectively, the ORPP is a new tax on everyone's paycheque and on businesses' payrolls. At the end of the day, if implemented, it will mean less take-home pay for everyone and may force businesses to lay off staff and halt the hiring of new employees because of the unaffordability of having this extra tax imposed upon them.

My PC colleagues and I are not the only ones to raise concerns with this particular part of the budget. Organizations like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Fraser Institute and the C.D. Howe Institute have all raised concerns with the ORPP.

The CFIB has stated that "A recent CFIB survey of almost 3,200 small businesses found that 79% are opposed to a new mandatory pension plan, with two thirds saying they would freeze or cut salaries, and 42% would reduce the number of jobs." In addition, Ontario's CFIB vice-president said, "It doesn't matter whether you call it a premium or an investment, a mandatory pension contribution on top of the CPP is a new payroll tax on jobs and will result in wage and job losses."

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has stated that they and their "network of 160 chambers in communities across the province are urging the government to defer legislation that will pave the way for the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. The business group is calling on the government of Ontario to answer outstanding questions about the impact the plan could have on the province's economic competitiveness. Businesses are concerned that the proposed pension plan will lead to job losses in the province."

In addition, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has come out and said it "estimates the ORPP will cost Ontario farmers, as employers, approximately \$30 million annually. This additional cost will likely be deducted from farm net farm income as it won't be added into prices for farm products.

"The ORPP presents a one-time inflationary jump in farm labour costs that" is simply not recoverable. "If we can't recover the cost from sales, farmers will look to wage caps, increased mechanization and fewer employees to cover rising employment costs. These actions could significantly lower farm employment and dampen Ontario agriculture's ability to achieve the Premier's job growth challenge."

I would now like to spend some time reading out statements I've received from individuals in regard to the proposed ORPP. I suppose if there was one advantage to all the leaked documentation and announcements that came before last Thursday's budget, it is that there have been a number of leaks and conversations about the implementation of the ORPP. Proactively, I reached out to the chamber members and business owners in my community and asked for their feedback comments, because I feel I have a responsibility to listen to what they say. Ultimately, they are the job creators in my community. More importantly, I asked them to participate in the public discussions that were taking place with the parliamentary assistant. I know that many of them took me up on that offer, and I very much hope that the parliamentary assistant is going to be looking very closely at the feedback from experts in the field, front-line individuals and business owners who are going to be impacted.

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This was one response I got. One individual stated, "After reading about the proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, I feel obligated to write and voice my opposition to it. What is particularly worrisome to our company is your treatment of a defined contribution plan, which our employees are currently enrolled in.

"From what I have read, a company offering a defined contribution plan would not be exempt from enrolling in the ORPP. We believe that we already offer a great plan and are assisting our employees in reaching their retirement goals. Why would you not allow companies such as ourselves to continue with their current defined contribution plan instead of burdening us with yet another payroll tax? Please consider redefining your definition of a comparable plan or scrap this idea altogether."

A constituent of mine stated, "As a local small business owner, I am not in favour of this plan. I do feel very

strongly about helping people save for retirement, including my employees. I think that can be achieved, however, in ways that provide owners with greater choice and flexibility. Being forced to contribute to another plan, such as the ORPP, handcuffs employers and takes away that choice.

"I would much rather be able to assist an employee by making an RRSP contribution on their behalf or a tax-free savings account contribution. This type of saving is far more beneficial to an employee upon retirement. It allows the employee the opportunity to plan their income needs throughout retirement.

"A pension such as the ORPP is not flexible and only provides a relatively small monthly pension benefit that cannot be customized for a person's needs. It also is more beneficial for estate planning purposes in the event of death. The asset, be it an RRSP or a TFSA, can be left to a surviving spouse or beneficiary. Would the entire amount of the contributions to the ORPP be left to a beneficiary as a lump sum? Not likely. So, again, I have issues with income streams that are not flexible. Those things aside, it is just another expense that an employer has to budget for in a time when costs of doing business are rising.

"I certainly do not support this initiative and feel it is unfair to impose it upon business owners. I would much rather be able to choose how and when I can help an employee to support their retirement income.

"In a year like 2008, when some businesses suffered, coming up with the extra money to contribute to the ORPP would have been a great "challenge. We don't want to force those businesses into debt when another 2008 rolls around."

Again, I'm reading excerpts from emails, letters, meetings that I held in my community with businesses owners.

Another constituent of mine stated that "as a business owner, my primary concern is keeping people employed. In what has become a highly competitive market, we are constantly looking for ways to cut expenditures in order to keep market share and keep people working. ORPP would add another 1.9% expense, plus additional administrative costs, that small businesses in Ontario don't need at this time.

"I believe that the majority of Ontarians are currently more preoccupied with short-term employment rather than long-term retirement. Not having a job doesn't help ORPP. If our current Ontario government would look at running our province as a business and look at reducing waste—just a few examples; too many to mention—reducing government," such as "gas plants, eHealth, Ornge, costing Ontarians billions, and the increasing costs of energy—closing generating plants, not having alternative solutions in place, buying US energy at much higher costs—putting money back into taxpayers' pockets so that we could have extra money that could be saved for retirement.

"Few Ontarians have little if nothing left to give the Liberals who have imposed environmental taxes, in-

creased hydro rates and now a new carbon tax. The well is dry. It's time to get the \$12.5-billion deficit and \$300-billion debt under control before looking for handouts and hiding the real problems our province is facing. It's time they come clean with Ontarians and let them know how close we really are to the financial demise of what was at one time the economic engine of Canada, and not smoke and mirrors or fearmongering of Ontarians not having enough to retire. Time for the Liberal government to face the music."

Another business owner in my riding stated, "On behalf of" my business, "I would like to present our view of this proposal and its impact on our business. As a small business in the manufacturing centre in Ontario, we are becoming a smaller and smaller group of companies as most manufacturing has either relocated or closed its doors. This is mainly due to the overwhelming cost of doing business in this province due to the Liberal government. We are inundated with out-of-control WSIB charges," Ministry of Labour "targeted inspections, unnecessary red tape, not to mention the most ridiculous hydro rates in North America.

"Now we are obligated—no, forced—to provide another 1.9% of our payroll total to this government, which amounts to a grab of approximately \$72,000 annually. No dialogue with small business and, once again, no regard for small business, the engine that drives Ontario. This government continually supports large American-based automobile corporations with handouts and bail-outs, yet shows no regard for companies such as" ours.

Another constituent of mine stated: "I have reviewed the ORPP consultation paper, and I would like to express how deeply opposed I am to the provincial government implementing such a plan. As an employer of about 65 people in this province, I can assure you that our company cannot afford to add yet another burden of tax. Such a program would most assuredly result in us reducing our workforce to make up the difference.

"If you are truly concerned about 'undersaving,' the responsible thing to do would be to initiate an education program to help people understand the need for them to take care of their own financial futures.

"The larger threat to the individual's financial security is our overall economy. Further tax burdens such as this will do nothing more than drive more business, ergo, more jobs, out of this province. This program is just another example of how the current government wants to take us further down the road of a nanny state. Enough is enough. Please stop now before it is too late."

Speaker, these are real people, real business owners who have questions and concerns with the proposed ORPP. This government cannot ignore these concerns. These are legitimate concerns from Ontario businesses. However, this government fails to see that every family and business has different circumstances and need to make their own financial decisions that best suit their needs.

Everyone here understands that saving for retirement is important, and there are many opportunities to do so.

The federal government has put in place options to encourage us to save for retirement, which include the tax-free savings account or the Registered Retirement Savings Plan. But the proposed ORPP will do more harm than good for Ontario residents.

This government needs to focus their efforts on tackling the deficit they created. Instead of telling the people of Ontario they need to save more for retirement, maybe this government needs to look themselves in the mirror and realize that they have a spending problem.

Next I'd like to discuss our second budget ask: We asked the government to shelve the carbon tax. Recently the government announced that they intend to implement a cap-and-trade system, which is simply another name for a carbon tax. The proposed cap-and-trade system will be a tax on everything, and is just a way for the government to get money from Ontarians to pay for the government's mismanagement of their economy.

Ontarians can't afford another tax or higher costs for goods. In addition, companies cannot afford this tax, considering Ontario already has some of the highest energy rates in all of North America. This tax will lead to a decrease in the number of companies here in Ontario, and will result in job losses. We cannot trust the government, especially with their history of mismanagement, to accomplish anything good with this extra tax.

The third budget ask by the PC caucus is for the government to fix Ontario's floundering home care system. CCACs across the province are unable to help Ontarians who need medical assistance when they are released from hospital. There are countless stories of this problem at the Central West CCAC that serves my riding of Dufferin-Caledon. Honestly, I could go on for hours citing examples of people we have tried to help over the years.

For example, one lady from my riding required a personal support worker only one to two times per week. Unfortunately, the Central West CCAC turned down her request because, as the CCAC continues to claim, there is no available funding to send a PSW.

In another case, a lady in my riding had been trying to care for her disabled husband in addition to her mother-in-law who had experienced a terrible accident that required her to go to the hospital. Upon the release of her mother-in-law from the hospital, the daughter-in-law requested help from CCAC but was denied. To get the needed assistance, the family actually moved to another city to get help from a different CCAC. The sad part is, there are many more cases like this.

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There is an example—I was trying to help a friend. Her mother was in the Grimsby area—only child. She wanted to move her mother up to Dufferin-Caledon so that she could be closer and offer more immediate hands-on assistance. Then she started looking at the available support that was currently being provided to her in the Grimsby area, comparing that to—let's be blunt—the non-existence of any kind of support that would have been available to her if she had moved to Dufferin-Caledon. Here's a family member who wants to step up

and help her mother, but it makes no sense for her to move her closer. How is that compassionate at any level? Clearly, this mother would have been more confident and more comfortable having her family member close by, but the other side of that argument, being able to say, "No, I'm not going to—I'm going to go with absolutely no support"—it's an untenable choice that the family was put into, and one that we have to fix now. We can't leave this CCAC mess continuing.

Again, on the weekend, at the home show I spoke to someone who, over the years, has been quite active with the CCAC. I can tell you we've had a number of heated discussions about it because, in the past, he's been quite a strong defender of the CCAC model. This weekend he said it's a complete mess. It has to be dealt with. The CCAC actually got to point where last summer, after the election, one of the first pieces of mail that I opened as the MPP for Dufferin-Caledon was from the CCAC, saying, "Oh, by the way, we have no more money and we're not accepting any more patients." Come on. What happened to need? What happened to, "We're going to manage our workload"? What happened to, "We're not going to give the CEO another 27%, and maybe put it towards health care"? It was a damning indictment that someone who for years and years had been defending the CCAC model came forward to me on the weekend and said, "It's not working, Sylvia. It can't be fixed. It's not a matter of tinkering. We need to start finding a model that works."

I can assure you, in Dufferin-Caledon the CCAC model is not working.

Unfortunately, this government is choosing the opposite. The government is taking more money away from health care. These are services that people across the province rely on and expect their hard-earned money to go towards.

I'm not sure that I'm going to have time to go through all of the asks, but I guess I just want to finish with: As parliamentarians, we have many opportunities in the course of our daily work and work back in the riding to talk to people about how government policies impact them. I think we need to do a lot more listening to people about how this budget is going to impact the vast majority of people in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I listened with interest to the remarks from the member for Dufferin-Caledon, and I have to say I warmed up to her comments as she went along. Certainly, when she talked about the experiences of her constituents accessing CCAC services, this is something that I think every single MPP in this House has been hearing about day after day after day in our constituency offices.

Despite the proclamation by the government that they are going to be topping up funding for the community care sector, I heard one analyst refer to the amount of money that's allocated to community care—it's like a rounding error. It's such a minimal amount of the money

that is allocated to health care that even topping it up makes no difference. It doesn't address the serious levels of need that we have in our community.

Yesterday, the member from London—Fanshawe and I held meetings in London with registered nurses and with community agencies that provide services for people who are experiencing mental health challenges. These community agencies are cut to the bone. They are not able to respond to the levels of need that we hear in our community. They are getting nothing—nothing from the government, nothing in this budget, despite the brand of being the activist centre and a progressive government.

This is an austerity budget. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it. People who are living in our communities know it. They feel it. They get it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm pleased to be able to speak about the budget this afternoon. I haven't had a chance to do that since the budget was presented last week.

What I have had an opportunity to do is attend a number of post-budget events, including with yourself, Speaker, in Scarborough. On Friday morning, the Scarborough MPPs got together with the Rotary Club of Scarborough. That's an annual event that has been going on for a number of years. It's always a pleasure to be there with my colleagues but also, more importantly, to hear what the initial reactions are to the budget. At that post-budget event, we had questions about hospitals. We had questions about infrastructure. We had questions about dental programs for young children. I just thought that was fantastic.

On Monday, I facilitated a post-budget event with the Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade—again, another great opportunity to meet with business leaders in the community. They had some good questions. They want to know more about infrastructure investments. They wanted to give us some feedback about how pleased they were with the investments in apprenticeship programs. They asked some really great questions.

Tonight, Speaker, I'm heading out to the Highland Creek community centre AGM, and we're going to talk about the budget there. So I should have this budget thing down pat by tonight's event.

Every time I go to an event, I realize that different parts of the budget mean different things to people. Overall, my sense is that people understand that this budget really benefits all Ontarians. There are some pieces that are targeted at certain groups, but the feedback has been very positive.

I'm happy to have shared my experience with the House today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Mrs. Gila Martow: The word here is "budget," and I think that people in this House have forgotten what the word "budget" means. "Budget" means, "This is how much income you have, and you have to work within that

income." It doesn't mean that you borrow from the banks that future generations have to pay and so that your revenue is decreased by the amount of interest that you have to pay. Some people don't realize this, but guess what? Governments, just like individuals and families, have to pay interest on what they borrow.

We just heard that the federal government is managing to balance their budget and is going to start working on paying down—

Interjection.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Well, you know what? You have the money you have to work with. We need to work. What it means is, we have to prioritize. It doesn't mean that you ask the grandchildren of the children that are now being born to pay for interest on the debt. It doesn't mean that you ignore the fact that we have an aging population and that health care costs are going to skyrocket, as all the experts are telling us. It doesn't mean that you speak about little tiny programs and try to distract the public with things like beer sales.

It's pretty sad when the Premier has to go to speak to the OPP finally after three months just to distract from the mess of highway maintenance. It's pretty sad when we have to use a scandal, an OPP investigation, to deflect from another approaching scandal.

Mr. Speaker, I think that what we need to do is we need to start setting an example for the people of this province. I hear from my constituents, "Don't you guys understand that there's only one taxpayer who is expected to pay sales tax, gas tax, municipal taxes"—in York region, we have a regional tax—"provincial tax and federal tax?" People are taxed, and we cannot continue to destroy the fabric of our society by taxing them more.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the comments made by the member for Dufferin—Caledon. I won't explore the CCAC matter very deeply, other than to say that I've had to deal with the CCAC in Toronto recently—decent people in a situation where they don't have the resources to provide the services that our constituents need. Everything that was said by the member from London West about the difficulties with CCACs is spot-on. This is a dangerous situation. It puts people's lives at risk.

I want to take a bit more of my time to talk about what I see as an extraordinary part of this budget, and that's the fire sale of Hydro One, because the consequences of that will reverberate down through the decades in this province. We built this province. We built it as an industrial power on publicly owned power, starting with Niagara Falls. It made us an attractive destination for investors and an attractive destination for manufacturing. The Conservatives first and then the Liberals started this privatization of our hydro system, continue to privatize generation and frankly, now want to privatize the distribution.

Speaker, we've seen huge increases in the price of power. I'm sure you've heard from your constituents

about it. I have. We'll see huge increases coming out of this privatization of Hydro One; make no mistake. As much as you, the public watching this, will be paying out of your pockets, we'll see it burn a hole through your wallet.

I say to the Liberals here in this chamber today, when people get whacked with hydro bills that are substantially higher than anything you've projected today, you will hear about it. The form letters that you're sending out now to cranky constituents will not be enough to protect you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Dufferin-Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the members who provided some additional comments.

I'm going to spend my last few minutes talking about the last ask that I didn't get to in my 20-minute speech, and that's the credible and detailed plan to balance the budget. We hear this "balance in 2017-18" a lot. What we're not seeing or hearing is any kind of details and specifics on how that will be achieved.

The other thing I want to talk about is, people always say, "Oh, but you're asking for more things." The minister across the way is famous for it: "You're asking for more things." You're collecting \$50 billion. It's up to you, as a government, to spend it wisely and prioritize it where people need it, where there is an expectation.

I often go to schools. This week, I had two schools here at Queen's Park. Without question, the kids understand that health care is our number one spend and education is our number two spend. But there isn't a school yet and there are very few people who understand that the third-highest spending line in the province of Ontario is interest on the debt, money we've already spent. When people hear that, it puts it into perspective. Let's keep in mind that interest rates are pretty darn good right now. There really is only one other way that they're going to go. We get downgrades. We get threatened with downgrades. We have to rein this in, if for no other reason than, let's not make it our number two spend in the province of Ontario. We have to figure out a way to stop paying interest on money we've already wasted.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I first ask unanimous consent to stand down the lead for our party on this debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested to stand down their lead. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you, colleagues, who are agreeable at this late hour on a Thursday afternoon.

There are some things in the world, in life, that make me particularly crazy. One of those things is a bill whose name is directly contrary to the contents of that bill. There are bills—and I'll just give you an example here. This is a Conservative example: the Safe Schools Act. As soon as I saw that title, I thought, "Bad news for kids,

because this is going to mean an act that's going to make things much less safe."

The Liberals had a great act. It was called the Putting Students First Act, Bill 115. You know right off the top that students are going to be in trouble, that their considerations are going to be at the end of the line. In fact, that was true. It led to huge disruption in the education system. That bill's title was directly contrary to its content.

Today, following that dreary tradition, we have the Building Ontario Up Act. It's guaranteed to break down this province, to cause deterioration, to make life more difficult. That is the content of this bill.

I want to talk mostly about the sale of Hydro One, because, as I said in my comments a few minutes earlier, this is a decision that will reverberate down through the decades. It is an act of breathtaking irresponsibility.

Before I get to that content, I want to note a few things. A \$90-million cut in tax credits to the cultural sector: As my colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo said earlier, some of these cuts are retroactive, causing disruption of contracts that are already in place.

I was talking to someone today working for a production. The producer was called by the bank and told, "I hear you don't have the money that you're supposed to have. We'd better talk about whether or not this film will go forward." This industry, critical to Ontario, critical to the east end of Toronto, has taken a hit.

This government needs to rethink this. It needs to rethink it, because if we're going to have a credible, dynamic, growing industry in film, digital and animation, we can't mess around like this. If you're going to have changes, talk to the stakeholders. If you have to have changes that are related to the fiscal position of the province, then figure out a way that everyone gets to survive and get through it. The way the government is approaching it now is irresponsible and it's destructive.

The youth jobs strategy is being cut by \$45 million. I don't know about you and I don't know about the rest of my colleagues in this chamber, but I get young people coming into my office, saying, "We can't get work." I get their parents coming into my office, saying, "My son or daughter can't get work," and yet this money is being cut.

The Toronto subway relief line isn't getting funded out of the projected investment in transit. Speaker, that's a vital line. I know many colleagues who have been on the Danforth line in the east end in the morning and find that it is packed.

My colleagues will address other cuts and reductions in service and education and health care when they speak, but I want to focus on the privatization of Hydro One. First, most critically, this sale will drive up the cost of electricity in Ontario. And there are a lot of other ramifications from this sale. There are environmental ramifications and there are ramifications around economic development. But for people across Ontario who are having a hard time now keeping their nose above water, paying their bills, people who've been hit hard with bills

this winter of 1,000 bucks a month, the idea that we would further privatize the system and further drive up their bills must seem totally crazy.

What has been our experience in Ontario with privatization on the generation side? In 2002, the Conservatives, with their big bang, launched the deregulation and privatization of the hydro system. Prices go through the roof, regulation is put back on, but the privatization part isn't ended. It's regulated, but the Liberals continue the privatization.

Every year, as more and more privatized generation is put on stream, more and more money comes out of our pockets to pay the profits of big corporations, money that didn't used to be on people's hydro bills, money they're now having to pay and take away from groceries or rent or clothing or entertainment, take away from the rest of their lives; money that enriches some corporations extraordinarily.

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I'll just note this, Speaker: This profit that's baked into our hydro bills—and the Tories and the Liberals are great chefs. They know how to bake up something that people will find hard to digest. Right now, TransCanada owns one third of Bruce Power—one third. It reported, at the end of 2014, a profit of \$314 million, out of Bruce Power. Now, I don't know what the others were paid, but let's just assume they have a third of the ownership. They get a third of the money—close to \$1 billion.

I've done a little bit of research on this, and it's very hard to find how much profit is now coming out of electricity power generation in Ontario, because there are some annual reports that are in Japanese. I can't read those; I just can't. Some are just not open and available on the Internet, but the best I can figure is somewhere in the \$600 million- to \$1 billion-a-year range—not part of our hydro bills in the 1990s, but part of our hydro bills today. So when people say, "How come I can't afford to pay my electricity bill?"—thank the two other parties in this chamber, who thought it was a good idea to privatize.

I was on Gerrard Street in my riding in February. I came across a constituent, a pensioner. She had gotten a hydro bill for \$1,200 from the month before, higher than her pension. I have constituents in my riding who live in Toronto Community Housing—housing that needs money from the provincial government to deal with a huge backlog of repairs—living in units that have electric baseboard heating, and they're paying in the \$600- to \$1,000-a-month range. It hits them very hard, Speaker.

Keep that in mind when you look at the history of privatization. We've seen our prices go up dramatically. In Nova Scotia, when they privatized, their prices went up dramatically. So why would Hydro One be any different? What is that magic ingredient that would allow the Hydro One privatization to be radically different from all the others? I don't think that magic ingredient has been revealed. I don't think it exists. I think what happens with Hydro One's privatization will have the same upward pressure on prices as the privatization we've seen on the electricity generation side.

The majority of the shares will be held by companies and interests that want to maximize their return. They may have a regulated rate of return, but when billions of dollars are on the table, you get some very creative minds in the room figuring out how to get more billions of dollars on the table. That's the way it works; that's the way it will work. Despite everything the Liberals say, this is the wrong decision, and you, the people of Ontario, are going to pay the price.

We've had assurances from cabinet ministers, from the Premier that we're safe: "Don't worry. We've got regulatory authority in place to protect you and the families that depend on you." Well, Speaker, don't believe that. Don't believe that. They say that the OEB will regulate prices, but I want to remind you: Just a year ago, when Enbridge came to the OEB with a request for a 40% increase in gas prices, were they told to go away? No. They were told to stage it, but indeed, that's what we got. That's a bit of a bump, a bit of a hit—and that's now.

I want to say to you, Speaker, the experience in the United States is that as you deal with more politically powerful, regulated corporations, the more power is imposed on those regulators. It's something called regulatory capture, where the regulated companies have enough political muscle to dictate to the regulator how they're going to operate through their political masters. Regulators leave a company, leave their regulatory job and get hired by the companies that they were regulating. Or they leave that company and get hired by the regulator. It's a very cozy arrangement. You have to understand—you who are watching this, you who are going to be paying the bills—that that's what door is being opened today in Ontario, and that bill is not going to be a small one.

Ed Clark, who was hired by this government to figure out what to do with finances, what to do with these assets, says that the Ontario Energy Board will be beefed up, will be made stronger. Well, I look forward to seeing the clauses in this bill that make the OEB stronger. I look forward to the demonstration that they've worked in other jurisdictions and actually put in place the control that allowed us to avoid any unpleasantness with companies that have the political muscle to force through bigger and bigger increases. There's a lot of hand-waving here but unfortunately not a lot of real substance.

It isn't just that we'll be left only with the Ontario Energy Board to deal with regulation. It's that we will also have a variety of safeguards that exist now that will be swept out the door. The sunshine list will no longer apply to Hydro One. It will never apply to Hydro One. So if the new board of the new Hydro One decides to pay the new CEO and the CEO's vice-presidents tens of millions of dollars a year in salary or decides to give them shares worth tens of millions of dollars, we won't know, because it all goes behind a black screen.

The ability of this Legislature and the people in this province to hold Hydro One to account through that one particular measure will be swept away—gone. We'll pay, Speaker. Don't make any mistake: We will pay. But where the money is going will no longer be clear.

The Auditor General will no longer have control, responsibility, authority in dealing with Hydro One. If we hadn't had the Auditor General, then we wouldn't have known the Liberals blew a billion bucks on gas plants to protect their seats—a useful thing to have. We have an officer of the Legislature, someone who reports to the Legislature as a whole who can go into crown corporations, look at the books and see if things are going wrong and can give us the information that we need to protect ourselves.

I'll tell you, when the private energy corporation Enron was looting the people of California in the 1990s, their auditor, Arthur Andersen, didn't protect the people of California, didn't protect the investors who had money in Enron. That auditor didn't have the power that our Auditor General has. That auditor was pressured by Enron to let things go by. We will no longer have an auditor who reports to us about what's really going on, but we will pay the bill. We will pay the price.

Speaker, we lose the sunshine list, we lose the Auditor General's authority, and we lose the power of the Ombudsman to investigate abuses within that corporation.

The people of rural Ontario have dealt with Hydro One for the last few years. We've had instances of over-billing. We've had instances of people being given

notices just before Christmas that their power is going to be cut off. Who would shine the light on this kind of thing if it weren't for an independent Ombudsman who reports to this Legislature?

What's been proposed is an Ombudsman who will be an employee of this new Hydro One. Yes, I'm sure that that Ombudsman, confronted with the situation of an abuse of power, of threats to ratepayers, would never embarrass its employer, ever. It would not happen—another layer of protection stripped away.

Freedom of information no longer applies. If you think something's fishy—if we, in this chamber, think something needs to be investigated, if we want to ask questions and look at documents, we no longer have that power.

Speaker, you're being very subtle. You may be indicating that you want to stand. If you want to stand, Speaker, and say something, I shall sit.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Federal-provincial public infrastructure funding

Mrs. Amrit Mangat	3961
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Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	3961
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